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MATCHBOX SERIES

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(and Hot Wheels, Too!)

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66
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"MATCHBOX"
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"MATCHBOX"
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DODGE DUMPER TRUCK
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LAND ROV
FIRE TRU
"MATCHBOX"
"MATCHBOX"
70
GRIT-SPREADING TRUCK
BP
13
DODGE WRECK TR
RCEDES-BENZ
NZ' AMBULANCE
BOX"
"MATCHBOX"
34
VOLKSWAGEN CAMPER
"MATCHBOX"
10
PIPE TRUCK
7
FORD REFUSE TRUCK
74
TOE JOE
TCHBOX

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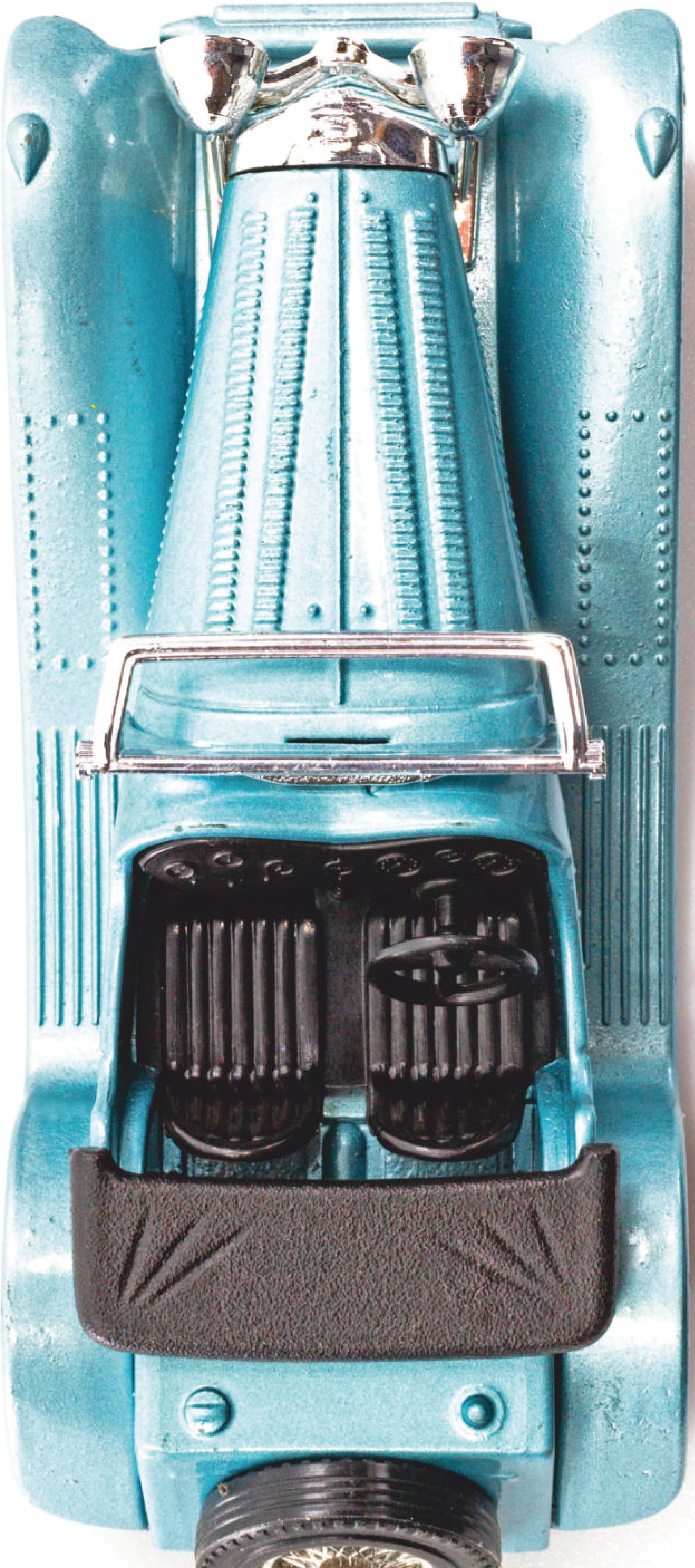
THROWBACK STYLE
The 1936 Jaguar SS100 is part of Matchbox’s Models of Yesteryear line.



MATCHBOX.
Dependable Quality Since 1953

"THE REAL ONE IS HERE!"

Why we love Matchbox cars

What could have ever been better than being 10 years old and picturing yourself behind the wheel of a fiery red Corvette? Or how about a racing car, with multicolored stripes and a big number on the door? Or maybe a van with lightning bolts on the side? Or a police car? Or a firetruck? Or any ride you saw on the streets of your hometown—or in your imagination?

That's what it was like growing up in the heyday of Matchbox cars—the toy that allowed a child to take the hottest automobiles on the planet out for a spin, anytime and anywhere they wanted. Matchbox cars looked and felt so real. They had doors and trunks that opened, wheels that spun in what felt like frictionless, perpetual motion. Every detail was right on the money.

And that's not all. With those pocket-sized cars came enormous fantasies and adventures. There were racetracks, huge ramps and wild loops that turned a simple ride into a roller coaster, fulfilling every child's daredevil dreams.

Matchbox cars were so authentic that even a living room table was a good enough setting for hours of fun, right up until it was time to put your cars away in an old shoebox—or, if you were lucky, one of those special Matchbox carry cases with the baby blue removable trays that organized your prized possessions like gems in a jeweler's case.

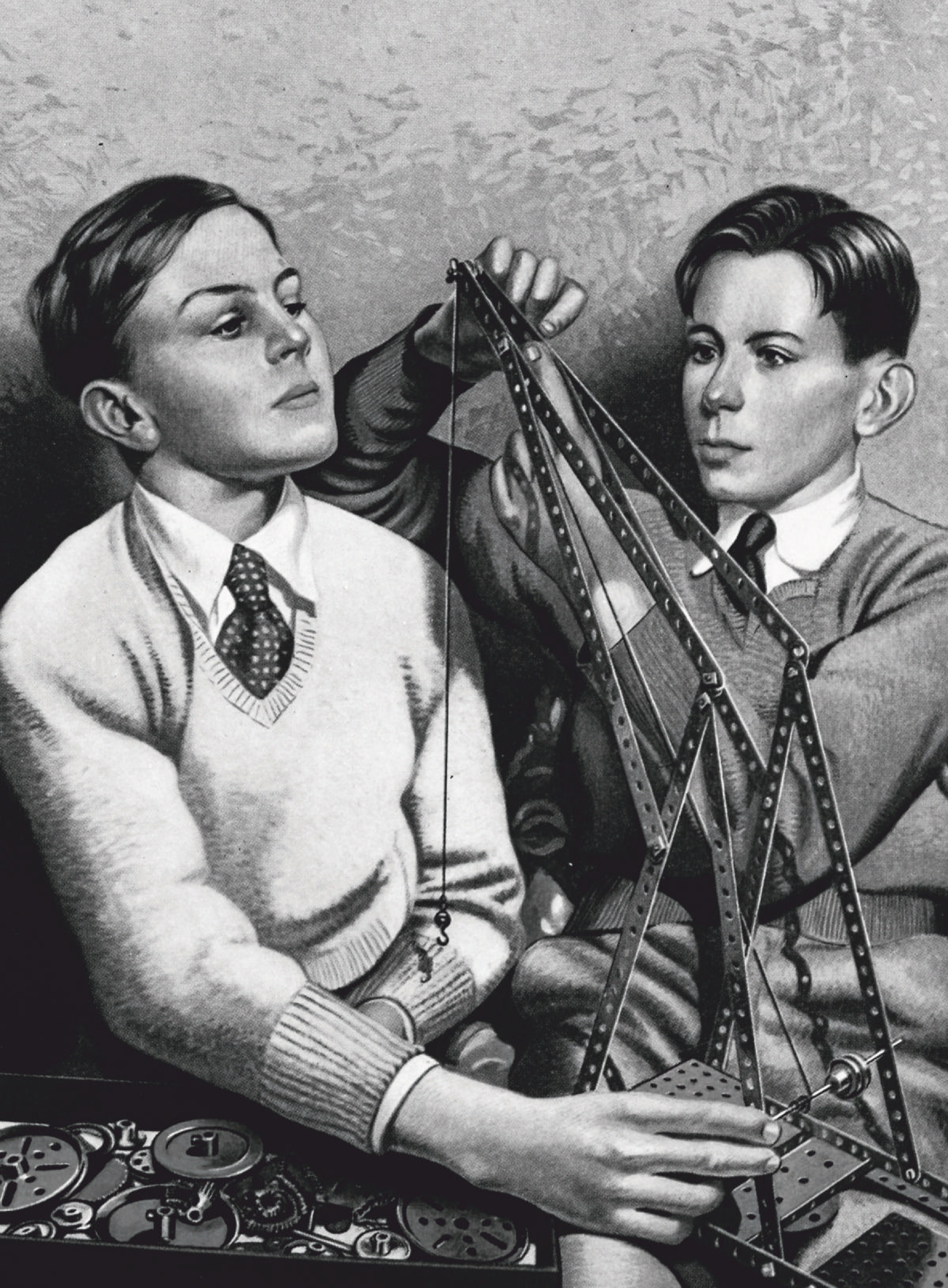
That's why we love Matchbox cars. They were a simple, affordable way for a child to dream about what they might want to do someday—from car racing to firefighting to driving a family-friendly sedan, anything was possible when you opened that little package and your brand-new car popped out. So what if you were too young to drive for real? The right Matchbox car gave you the exact same thrill.

PARKING TOTS
Kids have been playing with Matchbox cars for 70 years now.

1. LIFE BEFORE MATCHBOX

A brief history of die-cast cars

IF YOU BUILD IT… Two schoolboys construct a Meccano-brand toy crane, circa 1938, from *The Wonder Book* series. Meccano was invented in 1901.



The modern automobile was invented in 1886, and even though the first cars were for wealthy adults, it didn't take long for manufacturers to recognize that cars had an appeal for children of all ages. Model trains were already popular play things by the late 19th and early 20th century, so manufacturing model cars was the natural next step.

It helped that during World War II, new die-casting techniques emerged. Explained simply, die-casting is the process of forcing molten metal—under high pressure and at a high speed—into a mold, shaped like whatever the manufacturer wants to create. A variety of metals (some quite affordable) could withstand the process, including zinc, lead, copper and aluminum. The technology had existed since the mid-1800s, when it was used by the printing industry to create movable type.

Die-casting quickly became a key component of the manufacturing process for many things, including tools and real automobile parts. During World War I, it was used for military equipment and weapons, so the technology was constantly improved by scientists and manufacturers all over the world.

When that war was over, private manufacturers began to repurpose the newly perfected techniques for the consumer market—which led to a wealth of opportunity in the toy industry. If die-cast parts were strong enough for the battlefield, they could stand up to the rigors of children at play.

One of the first manufacturers to begin really capitalizing on the technology was a British company called Meccano, which was established in 1898 to build toy construction sets. By the 1930s, the company spun off into "Dinky Toys" and began producing model cars. There were issues with the first models, of course. They were considered very basic with no real interior. There were also impurities in the metal used, which resulted in zinc pest—a condition that caused the cars to crack, bend or even crumble over the years.

DIE-CASTING IS THE PROCESS OF FORCING MOLTEN METAL INTO A MOLD SHAPED LIKE WHATEVER THE MANUFACTURER WANTS TO CREATE.

EARLY ADOPTER
British company Meccano was one of the first to capitalize on die-cast technology for toys (above in 1924, right in 1935).

MECCANO
TRAINS
HORNBY
TRAINS
MECCANO
MECCANO
AEROPLANE
UBILDA FORT
UBILDA TOWER BRIDGE
UBILDA RACING CAR

CHAPTER 1

DINKY ZINC
Impurities in the metal used for early die-cast toys resulted in zinc pest, a condition that caused cars to crack and bend over time.

Plastic MECCANO
big pieces for little hands
Plastic MECCANO
big pieces for little hands
MOTORWAY SERVICES
No. 299 DINKY TOYS GIFT SET
DINKY TOYS
6 DINKYS
THAT HAVE EVERYTHING!
Just look at these fabulous action features!
AS ON TV!
Always something new from

CARS UNIVERSE
Meccano spinoff Dinky Toys produced sports cars, tractors, ambulances and tanks as part of its toy line.

> **THE FIRST AMERICAN-MADE MODEL CAR, A STUDEBAKER, WASN'T RELEASED UNTIL 1958.**

Still, the popularity grew. Dinky produced a series of automobiles, including sports cars, a delivery van, a tractor, an ambulance and a military tank. The market for model cars kept growing until production of the toys was shut down for World War II, when the Dinky plant in England was needed for the war effort and its plant in France was unavailable because of the German occupation.

When the war ended, production resumed and soon the technology improved, allowing for much more detail, including on the interior. Though Dinky Toys was the established market leader, competitors soon joined in. One of the biggest was Corgi Toys, which produced larger-sized model cars. Corgi rose to prominence by adding plastic windows to its creations, a detail that became extremely popular with consumers.

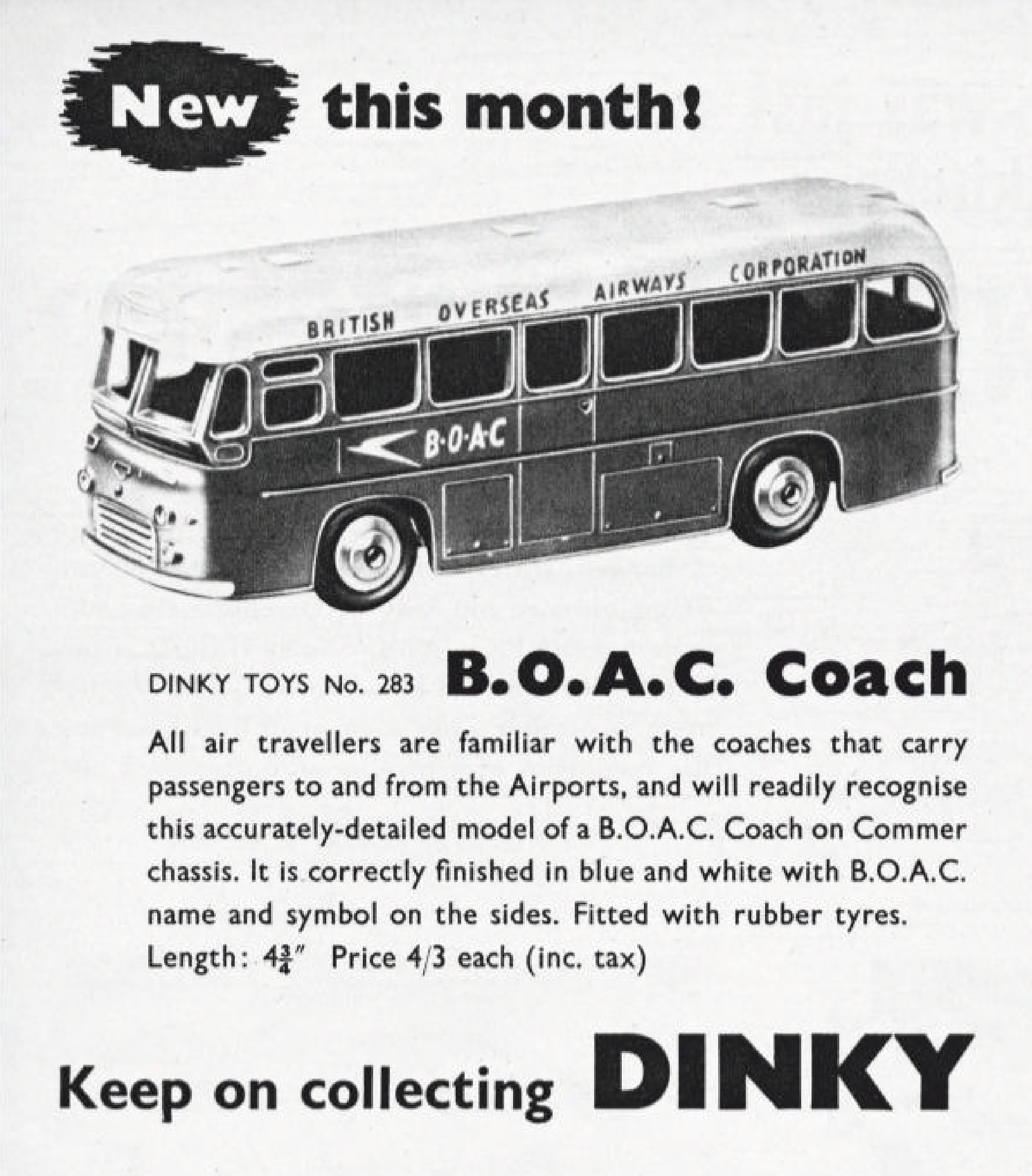
For years, most model cars came from Britain. The first American-made model, the Studebaker Golden Hawk, wasn't released until 1958. Eventually, Corgi expanded its business by exporting their toy cars all over Europe, North America and Australia.

Not surprisingly, as demand for die-cast toy cars increased globally, more and more companies entered the fray. The one destined to one day dominate the industry—and become Matchbox—began in 1948. That company was called Lesney Products, a die-casting manufacturer founded by

SPORT MODE
Below, one of Dinky Toys' Citroen models on display with other collectibles in 2005 prior to an auction.

DINKY TOYS
24 CP
CITROËN
DS 19
C'EST UNE FABRICATION
MECCANO
DINKY TOYS

WHEELS ON THE BUS
A 1956 advertisement for Dinky Toys' British Overseas Airways Corporation bus (bottom) touts rubber tires.


BRITISH OVERSEAS AIRWAYS CORPORATION
B·O·A·C

New this month!

DINKY TOYS No. 283 **B.O.A.C. Coach**

All air travellers are familiar with the coaches that carry passengers to and from the Airports, and will readily recognise this accurately-detailed model of a B.O.A.C. Coach on Commer chassis. It is correctly finished in blue and white with B.O.A.C. name and symbol on the sides. Fitted with rubber tyres. Length: 4¾" Price 4/3 each (inc. tax)

Keep on collecting **DINKY**

CHAPTER 1

CORGI
TOYS
CITY

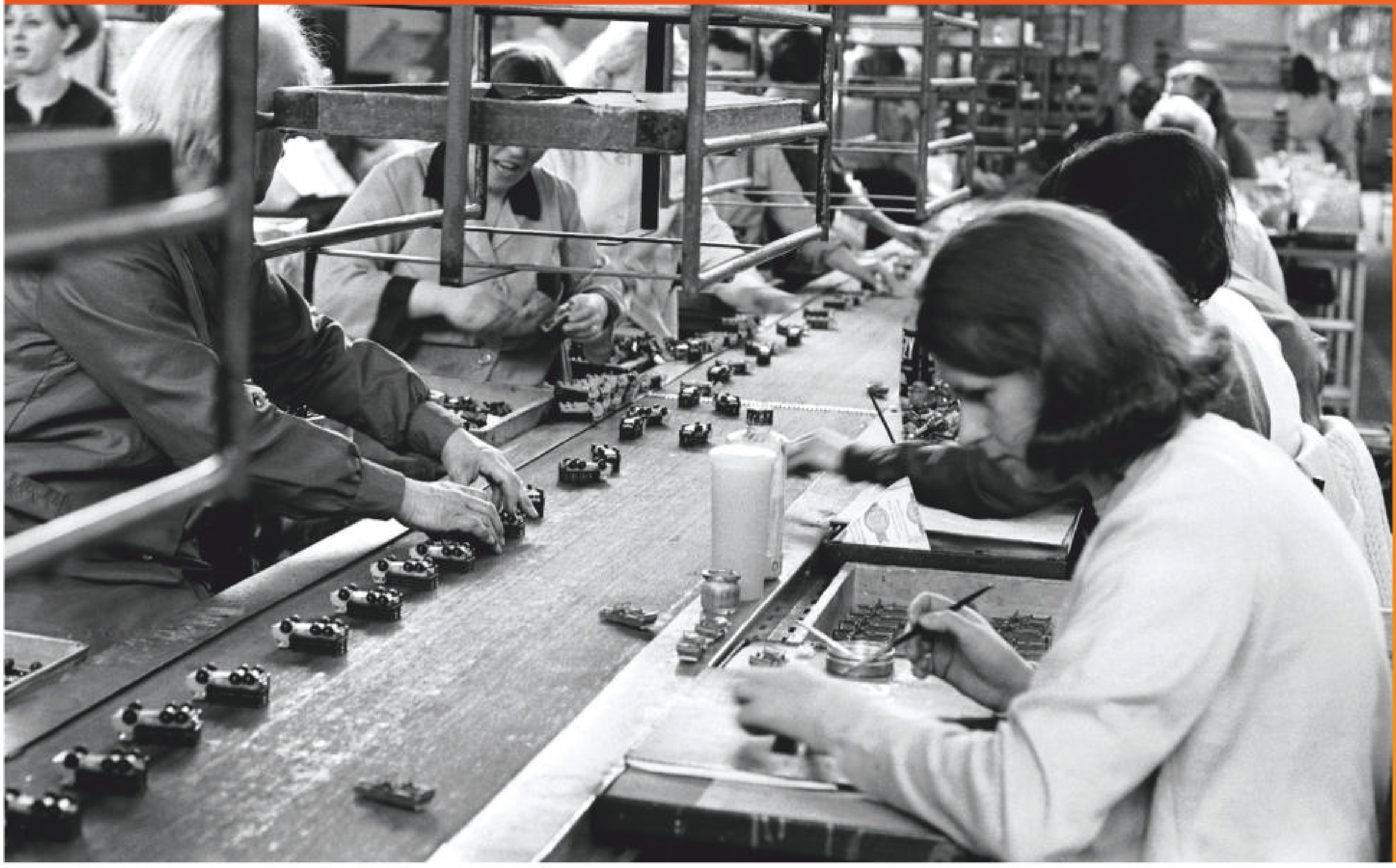
DOUBLE DECKER
A vintage Corgi Toys double-decker bus, pictured in 2006. Corgi notably innovated by adding plastic windows to its cars.

Naturally CORGI TOYS

AS DEMAND FOR DIE-CAST TOY CARS INCREASED GLOBALLY, MORE AND MORE COMPANIES ENTERED THE FRAY.

BRITISH AISLES
Die-cast toy Aston Martins (left) were produced at Corgi Toys' factory in Swansea, Wales.

PINK LADIES
Dinky Toys made a die-cast version of Lady Penelope's pink Rolls-Royce from *Thunderbirds* (above).



IT ONLY TOOK A FEW YEARS BEFORE LESNEY BECAME AN INDUSTRY LEADER AND REBRANDED ITSELF AS MATCHBOX TOYS.

Leslie Smith and Rodney Smith—two old school friends in Great Britain who were later joined by Jack Odell. Lesney produced its first toy car about a year after the company was founded, as well as parts for real cars, toy guns and various other die-cast products.

A clear imitation of the Dinky Toys brand, Lesney's first model car was a "Road Roller"—a tractor with a huge rolling wheel on the front used in the construction of roads. The company was still mostly known for non-toy products, including a popular fishing bait press, but that would all change in 1953 after a major event in world history.

That year, Lesney released a wildly popular miniature model of the Coronation Coach to celebrate—and capitalize on—the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The company continued to grow, and as its products became more popular, Lesney became an industry leader and rebranded itself as Matchbox Toys.

DOWN THE LINE
Workers on the production line at the Lesney toy factory assemble die-cast cars in June 1968 (left).

FINISHING TOUCHES
A worker adds the last little bit of detailed paintwork to toy trucks at the Lesney factory in 1968 (above).

2.

TWO MATES, A PUB & THE QUEEN

When Lesney began, they didn't have much of a plan

RISKY BUSINESS
Leslie Smith (pictured in 1966) and Rodney Smith went into business for themselves after returning home from World War II.

MATCHBOX Series

CHAPTER 2

The history of Matchbox cars is rooted in the British school system, the Royal Navy and a North London pub called The Rifleman. And it all began with two old chums looking for work after World War II.

Leslie Smith and Rodney Smith—not related—grew up as mates in Middlesex County, England. They were later reunited when they served together in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve during World War II. When the war was over, they returned to England together and began searching for jobs. Unable to find any, they went into business for themselves.

They weren't exactly sure what they were going to do. But both men had some experience in die-casting. Leslie Smith left school at age 14, and before the war he had worked as an export buyer for a die-casting company. Rodney Smith had worked as an engineer at a company called Die Casting Machine Tools, Ltd. (DCMT).

Rodney Smith also brought in a third partner—John "Jack" Odell, who had worked at DCMT too, first sweeping floors and later as an engineer. Odell actually wanted to open up his own die-casting

LESNEY INITIALLY BEGAN AS A BUSINESS THAT PRODUCED PARTS FOR AUTOMOBILES.

TWO'S COMPANY
Jack Odell (right) and Leslie Smith pose with a fleet of their toy cars. The duo stuck it out without Rodney Smith.

MATCHBOX
Dodge Trucks
Dodge Trucks
MATCHBOX
MATCHBOX
EXPLORATION
EXPLORATION

business, so in the beginning he only rented space in Lesney's offices at The Rifleman—a run-down, former North London pub. Eventually, Odell joined Lesney full time.

Lesney initially began as a business that produced parts for automobiles, such as door handles, and also had some success with fishing bait presses—which literally pressed bread into bait-sized bites that worked as a lure. Additionally, the company produced parts for toy guns and toy cars, but they were not focused on the toys themselves—at least not at the beginning.

Four years after the company was founded, Rodney Smith left the business, deciding that the future might be brighter elsewhere. Leslie Smith and Odell decided to stick it out. And it's a good thing they did, because their fortunes soon changed.

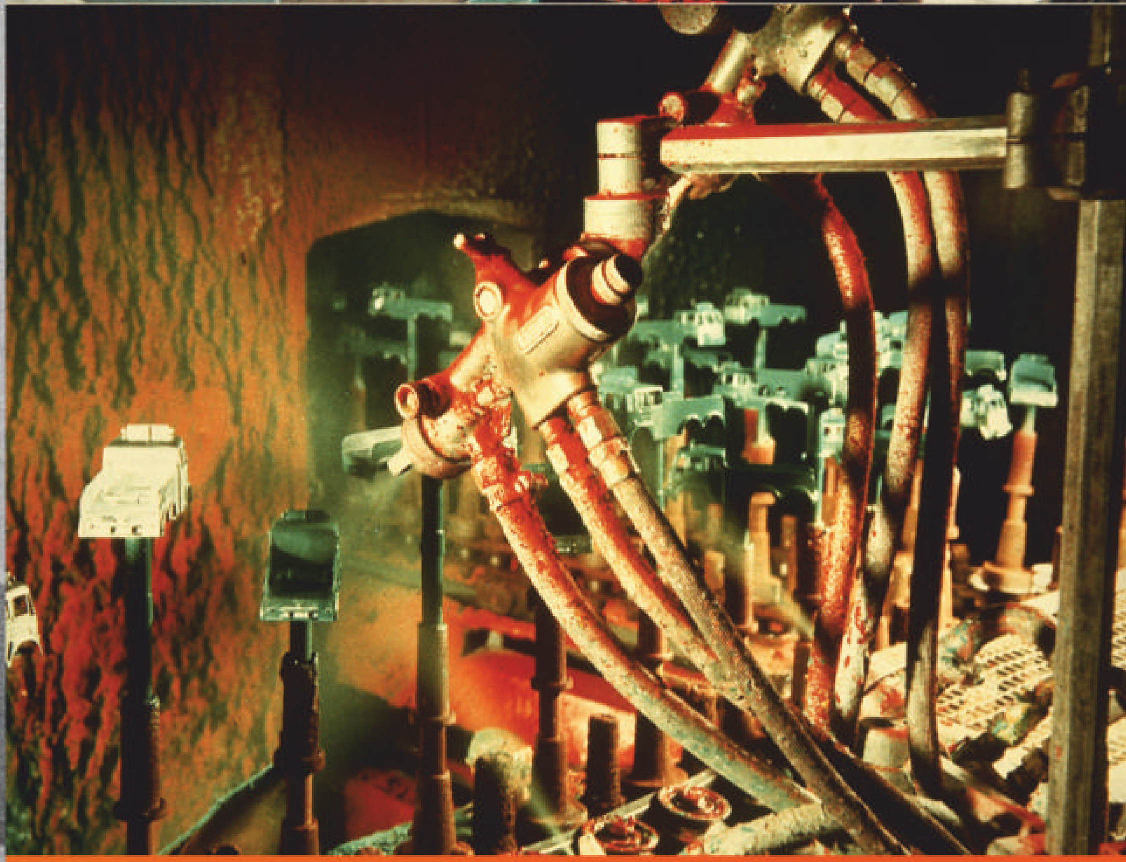
The first break came in 1952, when Odell designed a brass steamroller that he painted red and green as a gift for his daughter Anne. She loved it, and so did her friends. So Odell made more.

THE FIRST BREAK CAME IN 1952, WHEN ODELL DESIGNED A STEAMROLLER FOR HIS DAUGHTER ANNE.

GAME PLAN
Leslie Smith (far left) and Jack Odell pivoted to toy vehicles in 1952, including dump trucks, tractors and cement mixers.

BIGGER DIGS
After the company outgrew The Rifleman pub, Lesney moved production to a factory in East London (below).

NO WAITING
CHILDREN LOVE 'MATCHBOX' TOYS BY LES
LONDON TRANSPORT



SMALLER SCALE
An onlooker peers into a miniature bus in a London park in 1971 (left) that featured an ad for Lesney's matchbox toys on the side.

DOWN THE LINE
Lesney toys make their way through the production line in 1966, including getting painted (above) and boxed up (top).

THE TINY TOYS WERE SUCH A HIT THAT MODEL CARS BECAME THE FOCUS OF THE COMPANY'S FUTURE.

READY TO ROLL
Below, an employee fits tires onto toy trucks at Lesney's factory in 1968. The company is known for its Matchbox cars (right).

ROYAL VISIT
Queen Elizabeth II (opposite, left) observes a worker during a visit to the Lesney factory in London in 1969.

BP visco-static BP
"MATCHBOX" SERIES
LONGLIFE
5
LONDON BUS
5 A LESNEY PRODUCT 5

Realizing they had a popular product that cost little to make, Lesney decided to change its business plan a little. Using an assembly line they created at the old pub, Odell and Smith began producing more steamrollers and other car toys that Odell designed—a dump truck, a cement mixer and a tractor at first, quickly followed by a London bus, a fire truck, a tanker and other vehicles.

Then came a national tragedy—the death of King George VI on Feb. 6, 1952. His daughter Princess Elizabeth was next in line for the throne, and the incredibly popular 25-year-old ascended to queen. Her coronation in 1953 was the event of the century in the United Kingdom. It was the first royal coronation ever broadcast on television, where 20 million people around the world tuned in—the start of British royalty becoming a pop-culture fascination.

One of the lasting images of the historic event was the sight of the young queen riding through the streets of London in a golden, horse-drawn coach—officially known as the Gold State Coach—that had been in the royal family since 1762.

Smith and Odell saw an opportunity after watching the fairy-tale-like scene. Two years earlier they had the idea to create a die-cast miniature version of the Gold State Coach for the

FIRE EXIT
FOR

CHAPTER 2

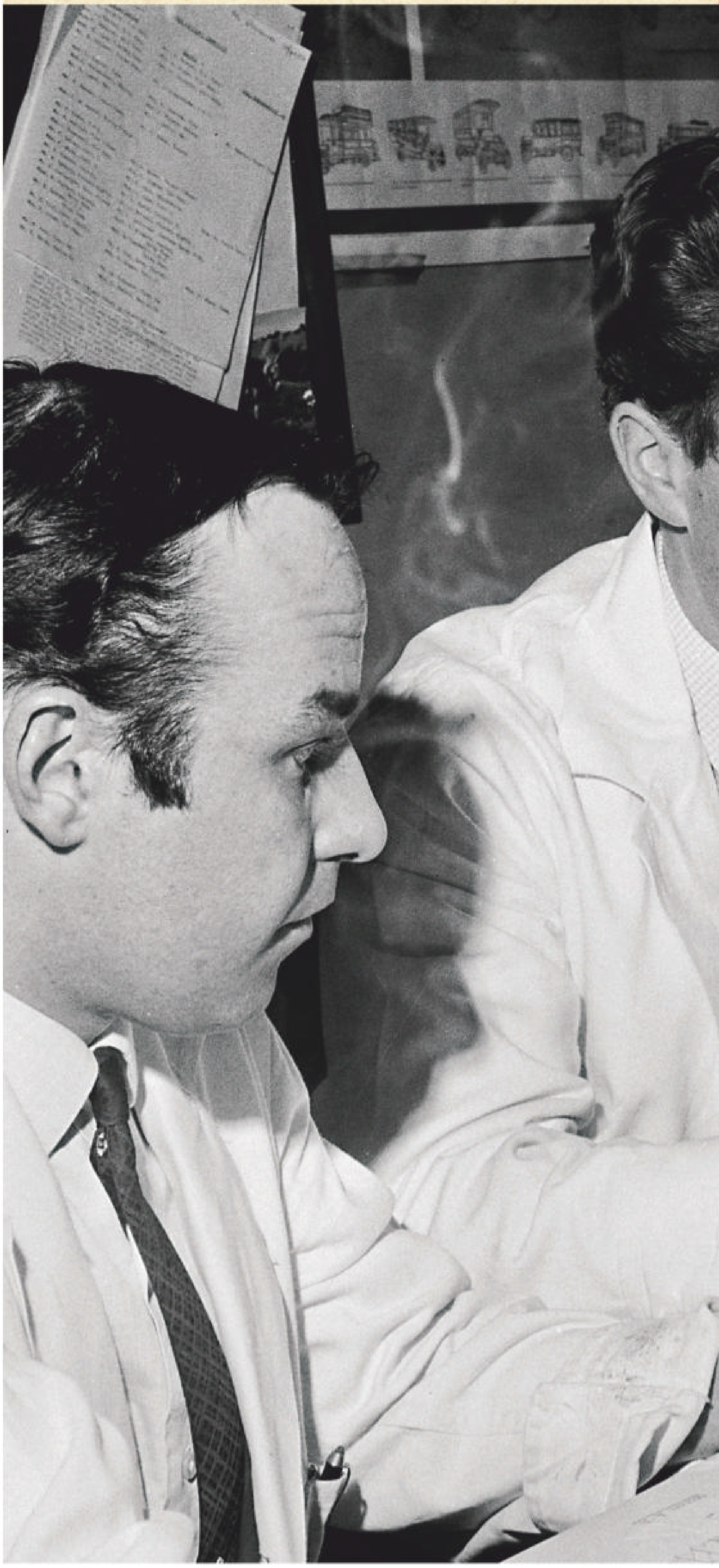
ROYAL SUBJECT
Queen Elizabeth II (center) looks on as toy models are spread on a conveyor belt. Her coronation ride was an early success for Lesney.

THE TIME WAS RIGHT TO MANUFACTURE THE TOY VERSION OF THE QUEEN'S ROYAL RIDE.

Festival of Britain in 1951. But the outbreak of the Korean War led to country-wide restrictions on the use of zinc, so the project was shelved.

With those restrictions now lifted, they decided the time was right to manufacture and sell the toy version of the queen's royal ride. They created two versions of the "Coronation Coach"—a larger model that was nearly 16 inches in length and a much smaller, 4½-inch model. It turned out to be the perfect souvenir to commemorate the new queen. Lesney sold 30,000 large coaches and more than a million of the smaller models.

The tiny toys were such a hit that model cars became the focus of the company's future. Odell began traveling the world to visit car companies so he could copy the designs of all the best vehicles. And Lesney began to grow so much that they abandoned their old pub, moving to several other locations before finally establishing a factory in East London.



CONCRETE CHANGES
Lesney's original line of toy vehicles included a cement mixer, but the designs have come a long way since then.

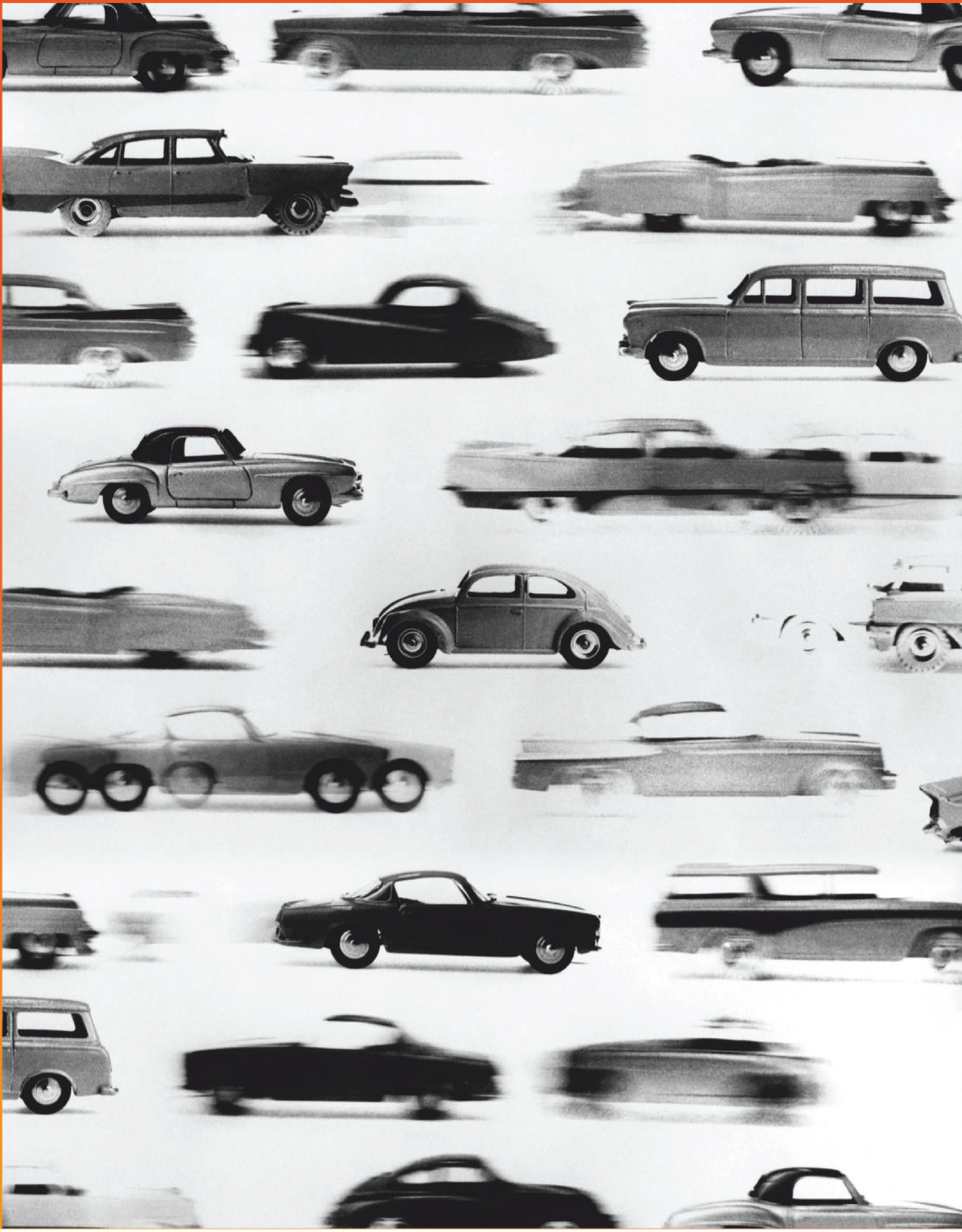
DESIGN THINKING
A team of Lesney's designers contemplate a tractor at the firm's headquarters in East London in 1968.

3. BETTER THAN THE REST

Matchbox quickly earned an enviable reputation

KING OF CARS
Jack Odell, one of the co-founders of Lesney Toys, became known for his skills as an engineer and designer with his detailed work.

LESNE



CHAPTER 3

The birth of Matchbox cars is owed at least partially to an actual matchbox. And mostly to Jack Odell's daughter Anne.

According to company lore, Anne was attending a British school in 1952 that wouldn't allow its students to bring in any toys that weren't small enough to fit into a matchbox. In the early days of toy manufacturing, that greatly limited the options for fun, so Anne filled her matchbox with other things—mostly spiders and various bugs.

Odell wanted his daughter to be able to play with an actual toy, so as an engineer with Lesney, he designed and built a steamroller made of brass and painted it red and green. He scaled the vehicle to be the perfect size to fit inside a matchbox so it was OK to bring to school.

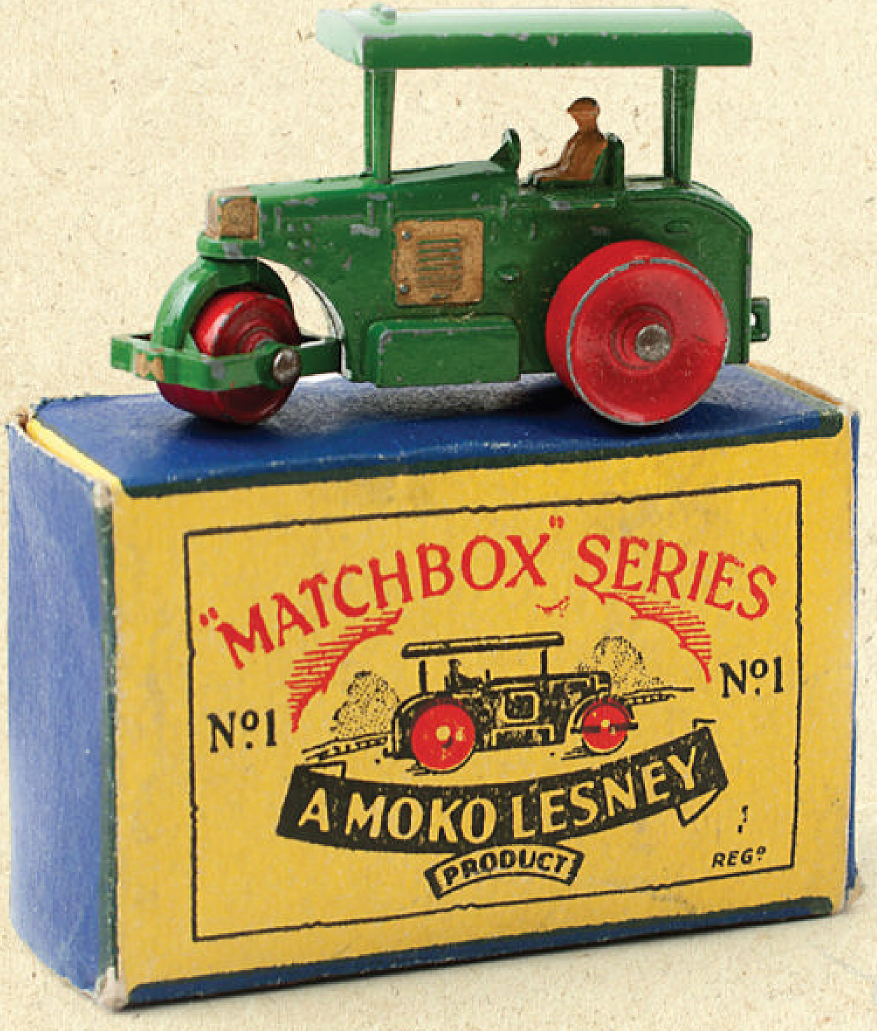
Anne loved it, as did her envious friends. So Odell went back to the company's headquarters and made some more. They were inexpensive to produce and very nearly the perfect toy—entertaining, nonviolent and the right size for children to carry around.

Odell and Leslie Smith, his partner at Lesney, sensed they may be on to something. So they turned their business toward mass-producing toy cars, and within a year they had several models rolling off their makeshift assembly line.

Production moved fast, too. The steamroller came first, but it was quickly followed by a dump truck, a tractor and a cement mixer—each of which was packed into a small yellow box and sold at local candy and tobacco stores. Lesney soon expanded its line of vehicles, adding a rover, a bus, a bulldozer and a fire truck, all with exquisite, incredible details. Odell prioritized accuracy, and as a result some of the earliest Matchbox cars had more than 100 individual die-cast parts, including tiny windshield wipers.

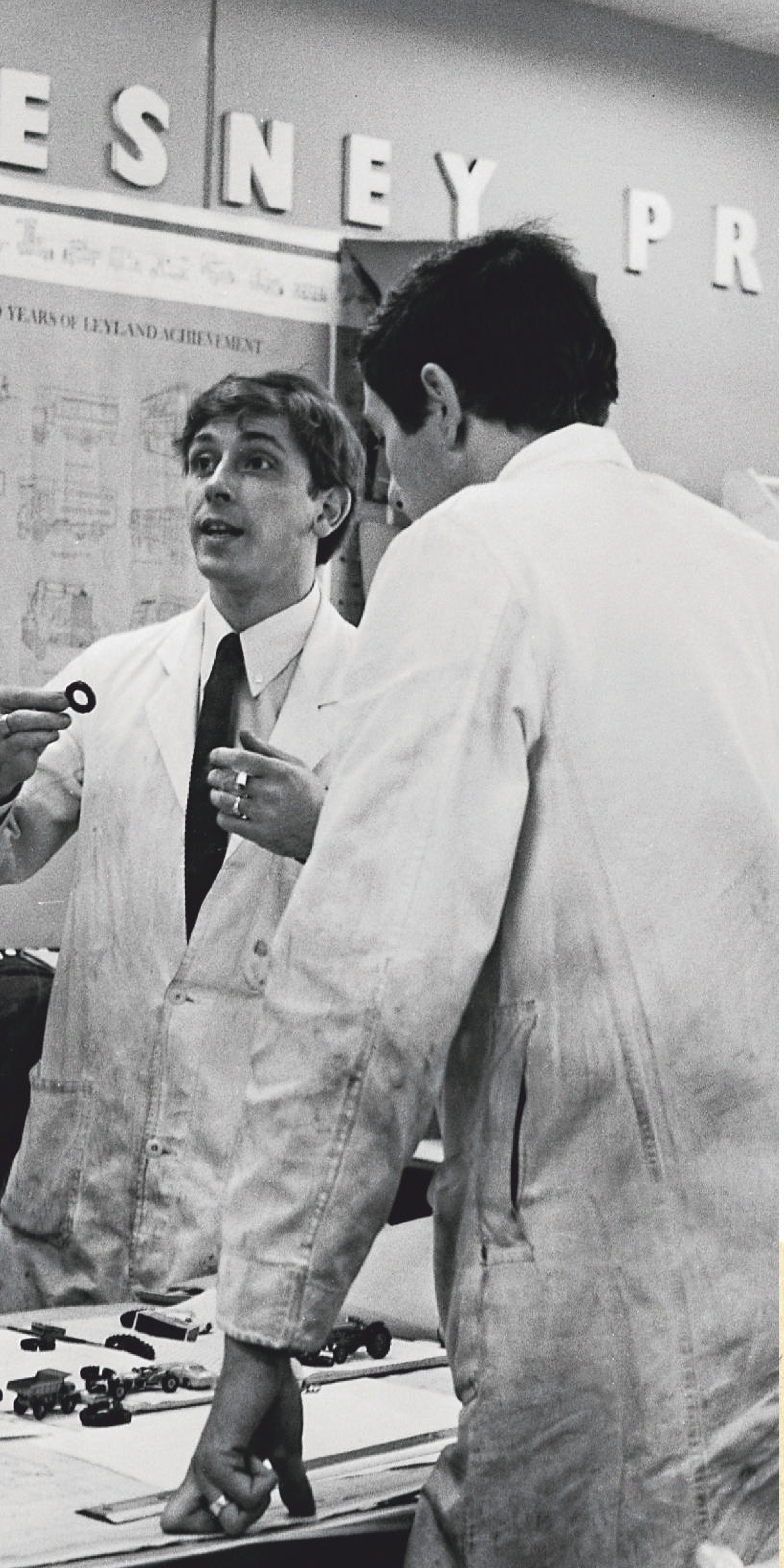
Odell also became obsessed with duplicating real cars. He traveled the world, visiting car manufacturers to copy their designs, which led to

> **WITHIN A YEAR THEY HAD SEVERAL MODELS ROLLING OFF THEIR MAKESHIFT ASSEMBLY LINE.**



PICKING UP STEAM
Lesney's first Matchbox car was a red and green steamroller that Jack Odell designed for his daughter Anne to take to school.

LESNEY


ESNEY PR
YEARS OF LEYLAND ACHIEVEMENT

CHAPTER 3

STEERING COMMITTEE
Designers and draftsmen discuss the new matchbox-sized die-cast model cars at the Lesney factory in London in 1968.

HBO
HOVERING

THE AUTOMAKERS WERE HAPPY TO HELP. … THEY WELCOMED ODELL TO THEIR FACTORY FLOORS.

Matchbox versions of some of the most popular cars produced in the United States, Germany, all over Europe and in some parts of Asia, too. When he couldn't make the trip himself, he sent other engineers. They would photograph the real vehicles and measure every component to make sure the miniature version was scaled exactly right.

The automakers were happy to help. They loved the idea of free publicity. They welcomed Odell to their factory floors whenever he came to town and let him inspect every tiny detail of their vehicles.

FIRE AWAY
Tiny, detailed fire engines (above) quickly joined the other vehicles in Lesney's Matchbox line.

DETAIL-ORIENTED
Some of the earliest Matchbox cars have more than 100 individually die-cast parts.

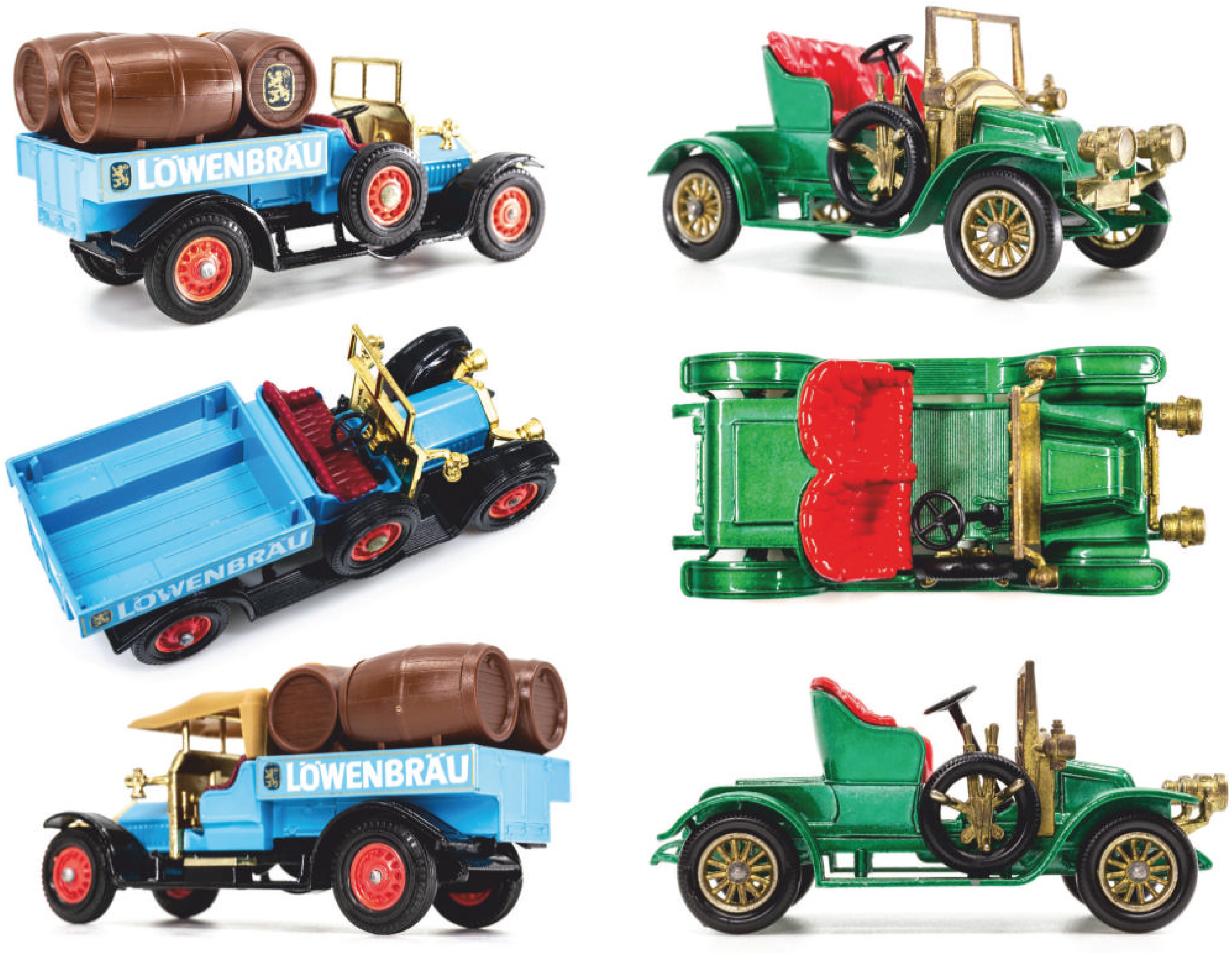
X" KING SIZE
"MATCHBO

CHAPTER 3

ODELL'S SKILLS AS AN ENGINEER, DESIGNER AND CRAFTSMAN WERE UNPARALLELED IN THE TOY CAR INDUSTRY.

SCALE MODEL
Odell and his team of engineers worked hard to replicate every detail of the vehicles their toys were modeled after.

TONIC WATER
PICCADILLY CIRCUS



> **LESNEY PRODUCED A SERIES OF CLASSIC CARS THAT BECAME KNOWN AS SOME OF ODELL'S FINEST WORK.**

They even provided him with blueprints in some cases to help him out.

Odell didn't stop with contemporary cars, either. He began to do historical research on some of the earliest automobiles from the beginning of the 19th century. In 1956, Lesney produced a series of classic cars that became known as some of Odell's finest work.

Quality and accuracy became Matchbox's competitive advantage in the increasingly competitive world of die-cast toy cars. None of the other companies could come close to matching Matchbox. Their models weren't just perfect copies—they were working copies too, with doors and hoods that opened and wheels that spun.

Odell's skills as an engineer, designer and craftsman were unparalleled in the toy car industry. And with a price that was equal to, or sometimes less, than the competition, Matchbox rose to the top of the market.

ALL DECKED OUT
Matchbox produced the AEC S-Type Omnibus (left) as part of its Models of Yesteryear line.

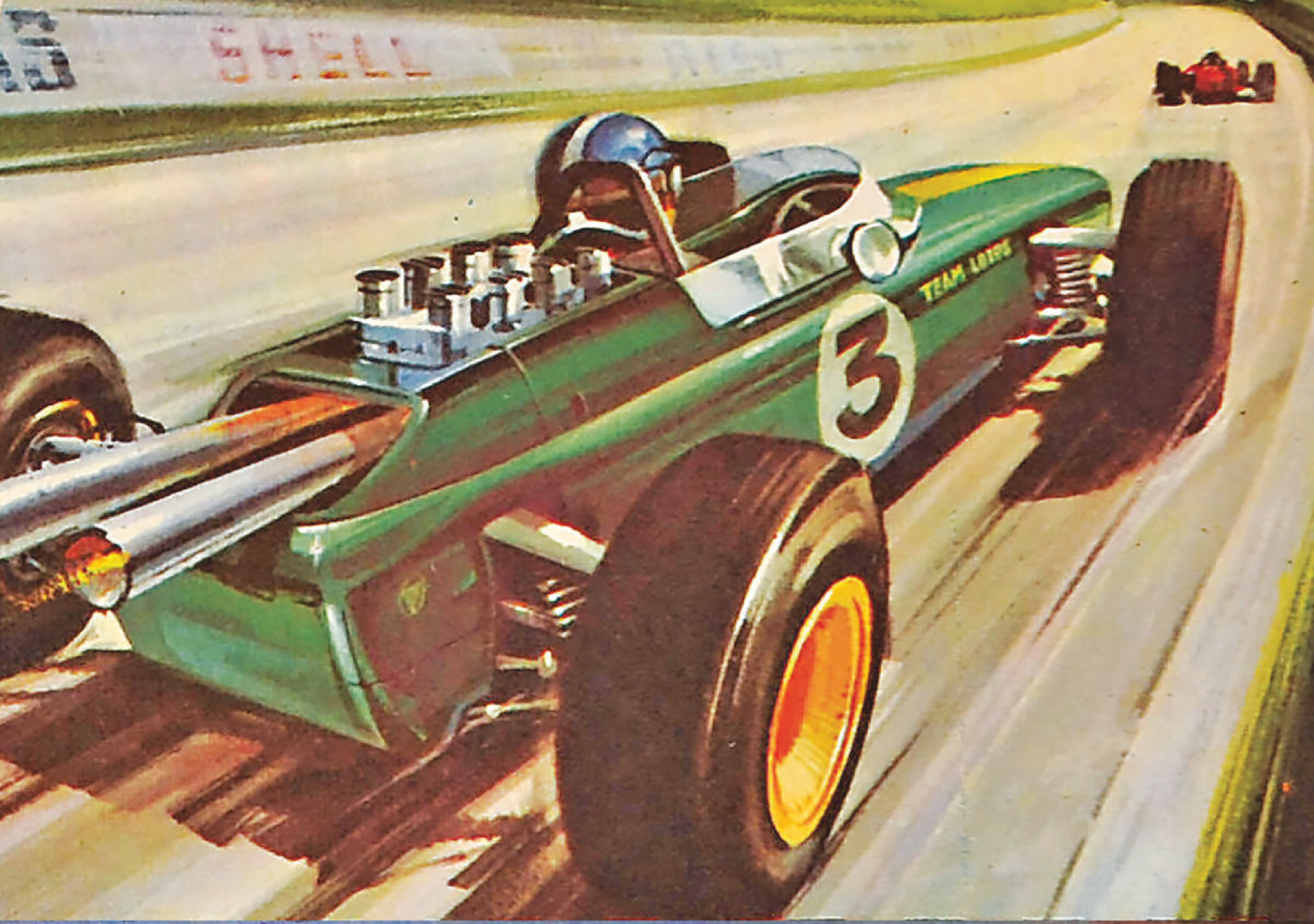
HISTORY LESSON
The 1918 Crossley lorry (above, left) and 1911 Renault two-seater (above, right) were also part of the series.

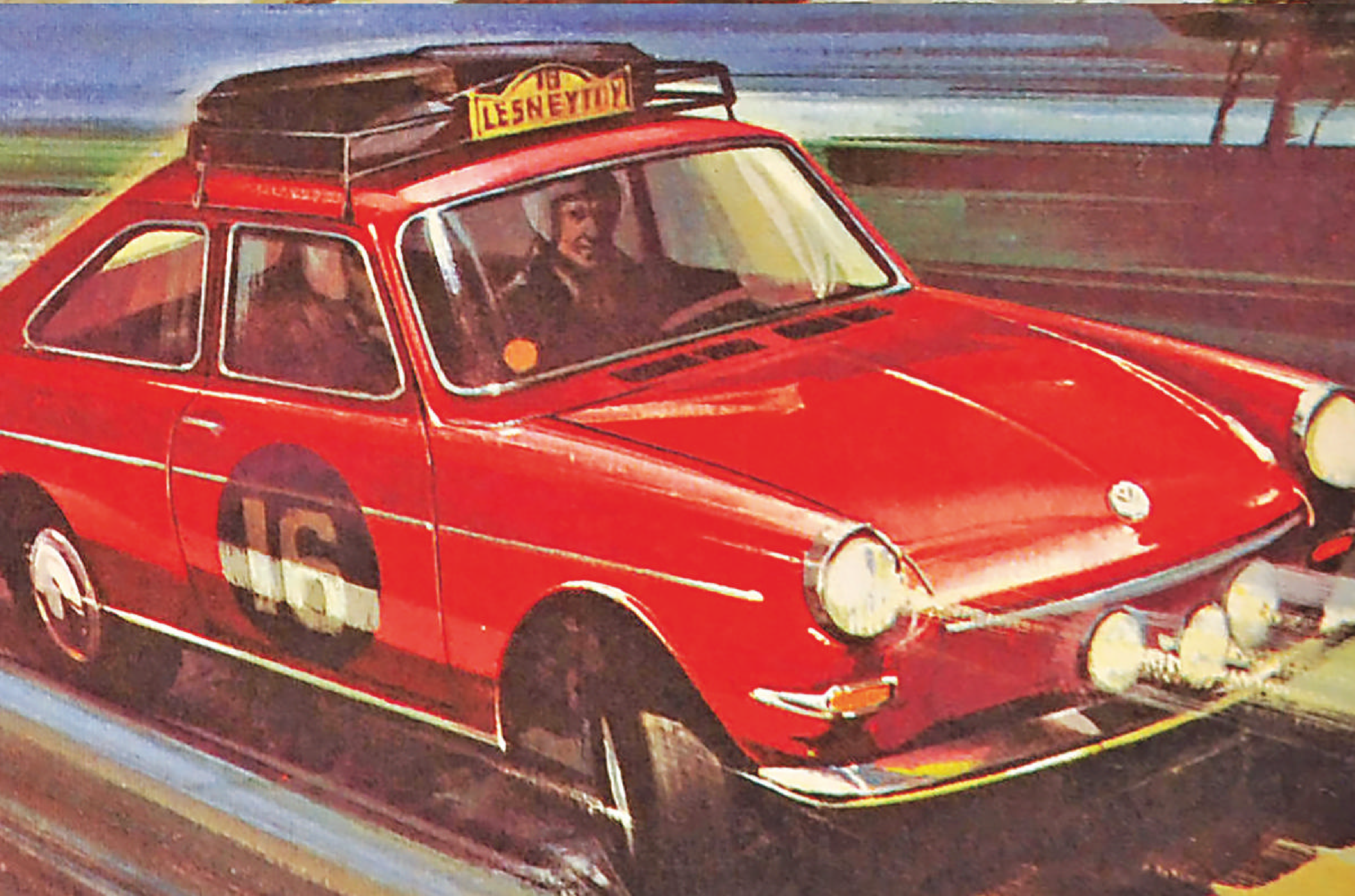
4.

THE FAB FOUR & 1-75

The first line of cars was a quartet, eventually growing to a fleet of 75

RALLY FITNESS
The Matchbox G-4 "Race'n Rally" boxed set included 10 vehicles, from racecars to an ambulance and fire engine.


SHELL
TEAM LOTUS
3


16
LESNEY TOY
16

CHAPTER 4

"MATCHBOX" SERIES
No 10
No 10
A MOKO LESNEY
"MATCHBOX" SERIES
No 65
No 65
A MOKO LESNEY
UROPEAN AIRWAYS
Drink Peardrax
OXO
OXO

MATCHBOX SERIES
No21
No21
A MOKO LESNEY

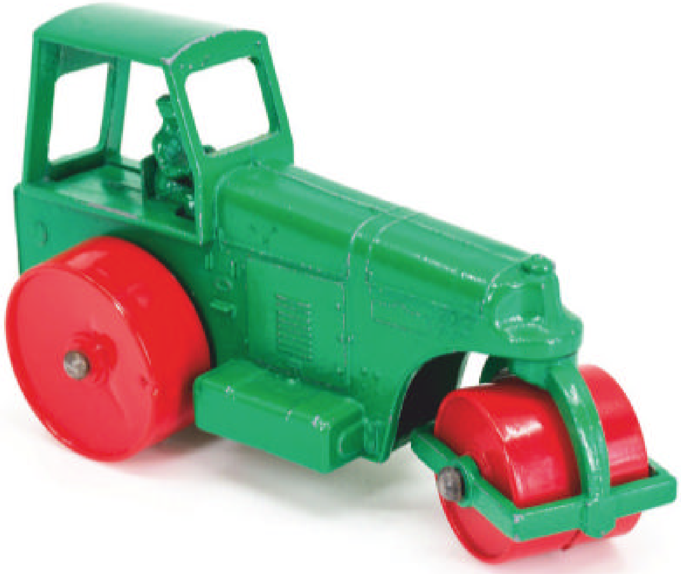
Anne Odell's Diesel Road Roller was the first Matchbox car produced by Lesney, even though it hadn't yet trademarked the "Matchbox" name. The road roller was a hit, but Lesney knew it needed variety to build on its success. So, in 1953, the company released four die-cast cars: a "Road Roller," "Dumper" and a "Cement Mixer" for starters, followed by a Massey-Harris Tractor. For collectors, these represent the original Matchbox cars.

These were all about the same size, with the same attention to detail and working parts. The back of the dump truck could be lifted. There was even a driver in the seat of the tractor.

That, of course, was just the start.

Lesney added three more models in 1954—a London bus, another dump truck and a horse-drawn "milk float." In 1955, 11 more vehicles were added. The line kept growing. By 1959, Lesney had 75 different cars on the market.

That represented as many die-cast tools as the company had, so Lesney made the decision to cap production at 75 different vehicles at a time—what became known as the "1-75 range." The company continued to add new models



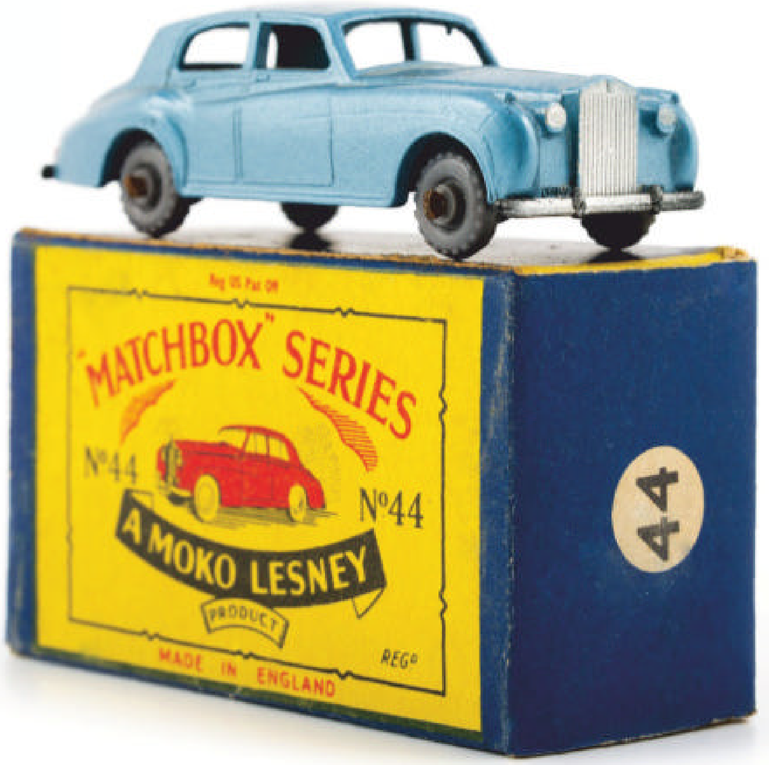
PARKING LOT
Three vehicles from the Matchbox line (left), which was notable for its diverse inclusions beyond cars.

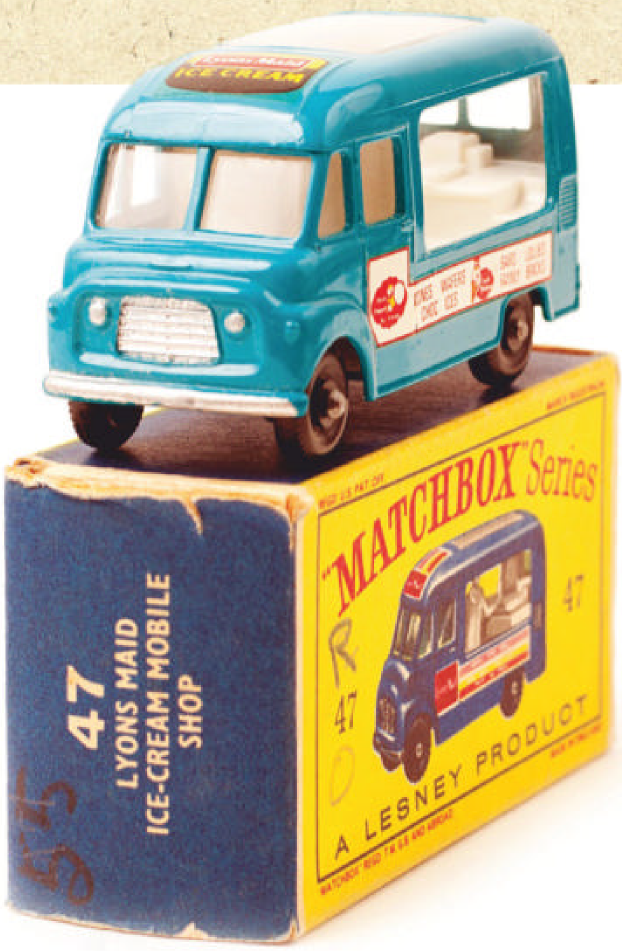
ROLLER DERBY
Odell's red and green Diesel Road Roller (above) featured working parts and was No. 1 in the original 1-75 series.

BABY BLUES
For the first six years, Matchbox cars were "A Moko Lesney Product," for the German distributors.

STARTING LINEUP
The 1954 London bus (right) was the first outside the original quartet of designs and became No. 5.

THE BARREL OF THE CEMENT MIXER SPUN. THERE WAS EVEN A DRIVER IN THE SEAT OF THE TRACTOR.





over the subsequent years, however, every time it did, it would be as a replacement for an older product. Sometimes older models would be slightly redesigned or given a different color scheme, but otherwise the vehicles remained in the "range" until they were retired. And every model was numbered, so when a new car was introduced, it took the number of the one it replaced.

Matchbox maintained this standard—no more than 75 models produced and distributed at any one time—until 1998.

The actual production process was fascinating. It began with the design, which was carefully done to make sure the miniature cars were perfectly scaled to truly mimic the full-sized version. The craftsmen then used the designs to build a detailed wooden model of the car, five times the size of the actual Matchbox product.

That gave the toolmaker the correct shapes to cut the steel dies. Once those were made, a molten metal mix would be poured to create a rough cut of the miniature car. The cars were then run through a massive assembly line where they were first painted in their base color, then sent through an oven to dry, and then back out to repeat the process with a second coat. When that was done, the cars were sent down the line to workers who assembled the extra parts, like the wheels and windows and the interior. Many of the details on the outside were hand-painted.

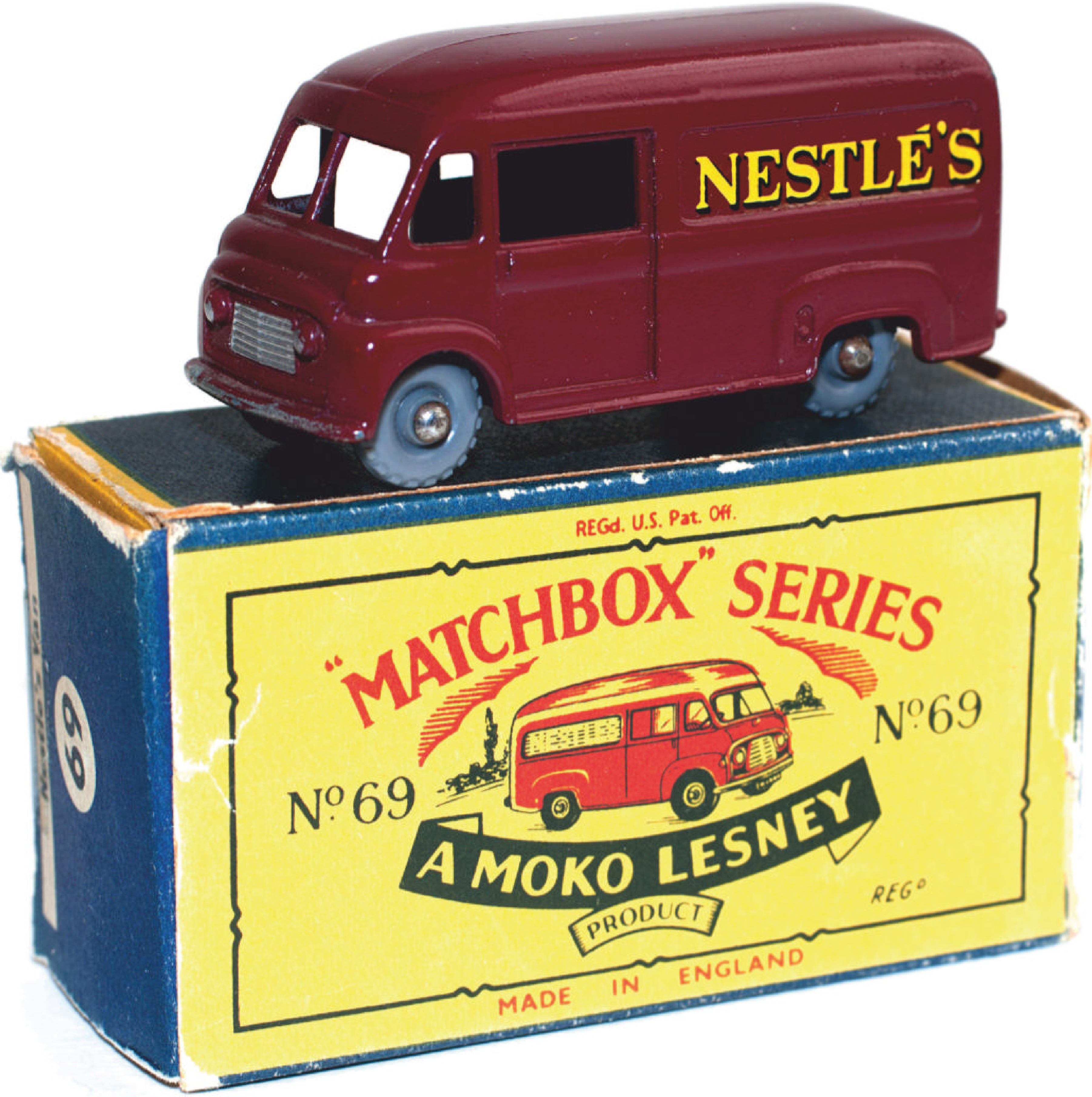
After that, each car was inspected one last time before it was individually placed into a matchbox-sized package—work also done by hand.

All the cars that Lesney made in its early years were distributed by a German company called "Moko." These versions came with "A Moko Lesney

BUY "MATCHBOX" SERIES
MATCHBOX TRADE MARK
"MATCHBOX" SERIES
visco-static
No. 5
No. 5
A LESNEY
PRODUCT
REGD. U.S. PAT. OFF.
REGD
MADE IN ENGLAND

CHAPTER 4

BOXING DAY
Each Matchbox car was individually inspected before being boxed up by hand in its namesake matchbox-sized yellow package.


NESTLÉ'S
REGd. U.S. Pat. Off.
"MATCHBOX" SERIES
Nº69
Nº69
NESTLES
A MOKO LESNEY
PRODUCT
REGD
MADE IN ENGLAND
69

Superfast 73
MATCHBOX
72
HOVERCRAFT
"MATCHBOX" SERIES
24
A LESNEY
Superfast 38
HONDA
MATCHBOX Superfast 36
"MATCHBOX" SERIES
43
A LESNEY
Superfast 19
MATCHBOX Superfast 23
MATCHBOX
L C C AMBULANCE
KLIN

THE TASTES OF CHILDREN WERE CHANGING, PARTICULARLY OUTSIDE OF GREAT BRITAIN.

OFF TO THE RACES
Matchbox launched the "Superfast" line to keep up with Mattel's Hot Wheels.

Product" written across the box. Lesney bought out Moko in 1959 and kept using the name until 1961.

By 1968—just 15 years after it produced its first die-cast toy—"Matchbox" was the best-selling brand of miniature die-cast model cars in the entire world. They were considered the best, too, with plastic windows, detailed interiors, working wheels and doors and spring suspensions. It was also the most diverse line in the world, with buses, farm vehicles, motorcycles, sports cars, rescue vehicles, trucks and regular passenger cars.

All of that allowed Matchbox to hold off the competition, almost easily, until 1968. That's when Mattel, a giant of toy making in the United States, introduced its "Hot Wheels" line of cars. They weren't as perfectly scaled or as detailed as the "Matchbox" line, but they were wildly appealing to children, with bright colors, sporty designs and low-friction racing wheels that made them go fast.

The tastes of children were changing, particularly outside of Great Britain, and Matchbox suddenly found it difficult to keep up. To innovate, Matchbox launched the "Superfast" line, which included low-friction wheels and the introduction of racing sets.

That allowed Matchbox to remain a powerful player in the world of die-cast cars. But it was a new world, and the competition was not about to let up.

5. TREASURE HUNTING

Some very valuable Matchbox vehicles—as chosen by an expert collector

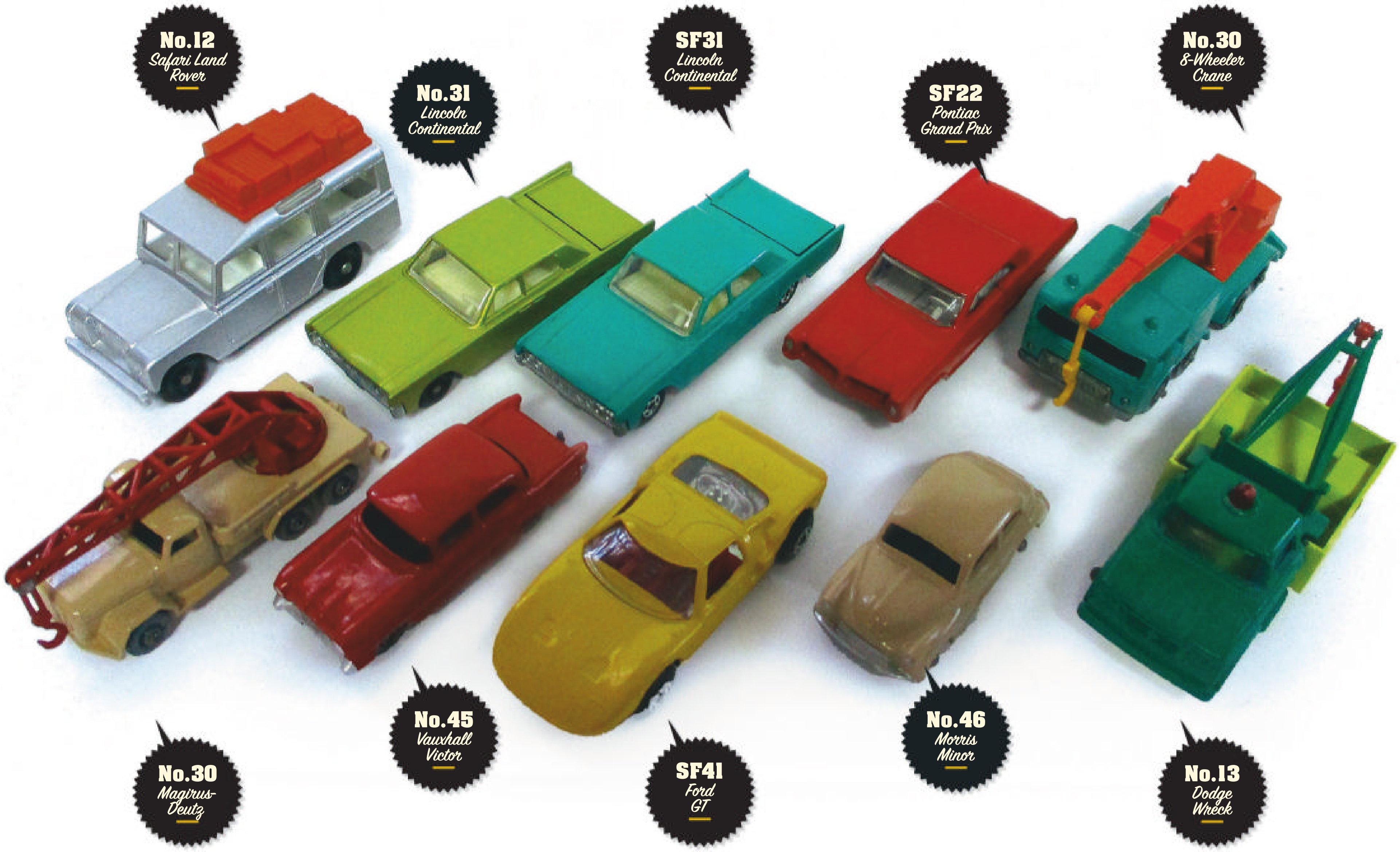
GOING ONCE
This green and yellow tow truck was part of an enormous auction of Matchbox cars and trucks in England in 2008.

BP
WRECK TRUCK
13
NEW

THE FIRST MATCHBOX CARS IN THE 1950s TYPICALLY COST ABOUT 39 CENTS.

Affordability was part of the charm—at least to parents. The model cars were inexpensive to make and inexpensive to purchase as well. Remarkably, 70 years later, not much has changed. Today, Matchbox cars can still be bought for a few dollars.

But there are some classic vehicles from Matchbox's history worth far more. Here are a few cars with great value, as chosen and valued by noted collector **Charles Mack**. →


No.12 Safari Land Rover
No.31 Lincoln Continental
SF31 Lincoln Continental
SF22 Pontiac Grand Prix
No.30 8-Wheeler Crane
No.30 Magirus-Deutz
No.45 Vauxhall Victor
SF41 Ford GT
No.46 Morris Minor
No.13 Dodge Wreck

VALUABLE FINDS
The 10 cars featured in this selection could be worth more than $80,000 collectively, if found in mint condition.

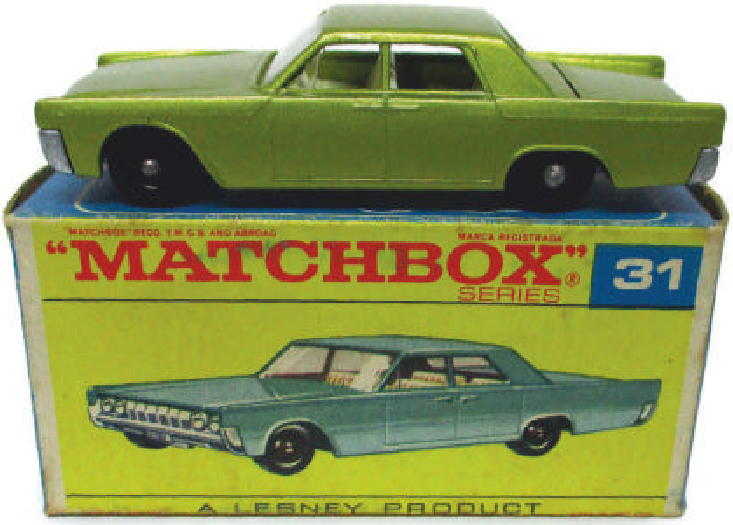
01

NO. 31

Regular Wheel Lincoln Continental

Estimated value:
$3,000 or more

Mack says this is a rarity because of its unusual wheels. Lesney must have had some regular-wheel chassis left over, and rather than scrap them, the car was assembled attaching the baseplates to Superfast castings.


"MATCHBOX" REGD. T.M. G.B. AND ABROAD
MARCA REGISTRADA
"MATCHBOX"®
SERIES
31
A LESNEY PRODUCT

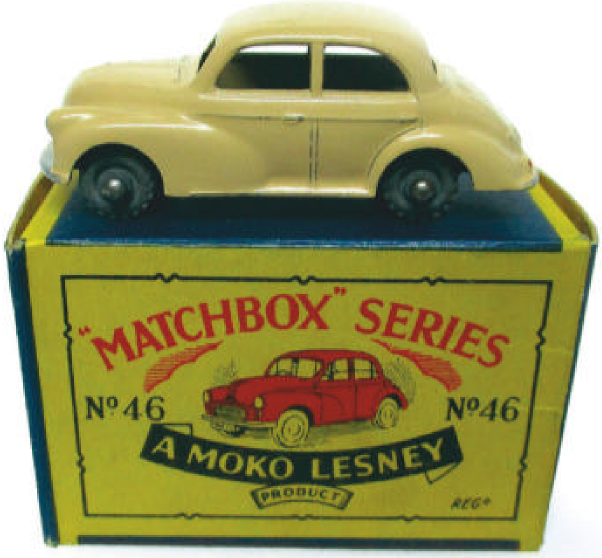
02

NO. 46

Tan Morris Minor

Estimated value:
$4,000 or more

This No. 46 Morris Minor with a tan body was the first release of this model. Thought to originally be a color trial during preproduction, enough were made to slip into public release, though none have surfaced recently in any major auctions. The last one known to have sold was via private sale in 2000.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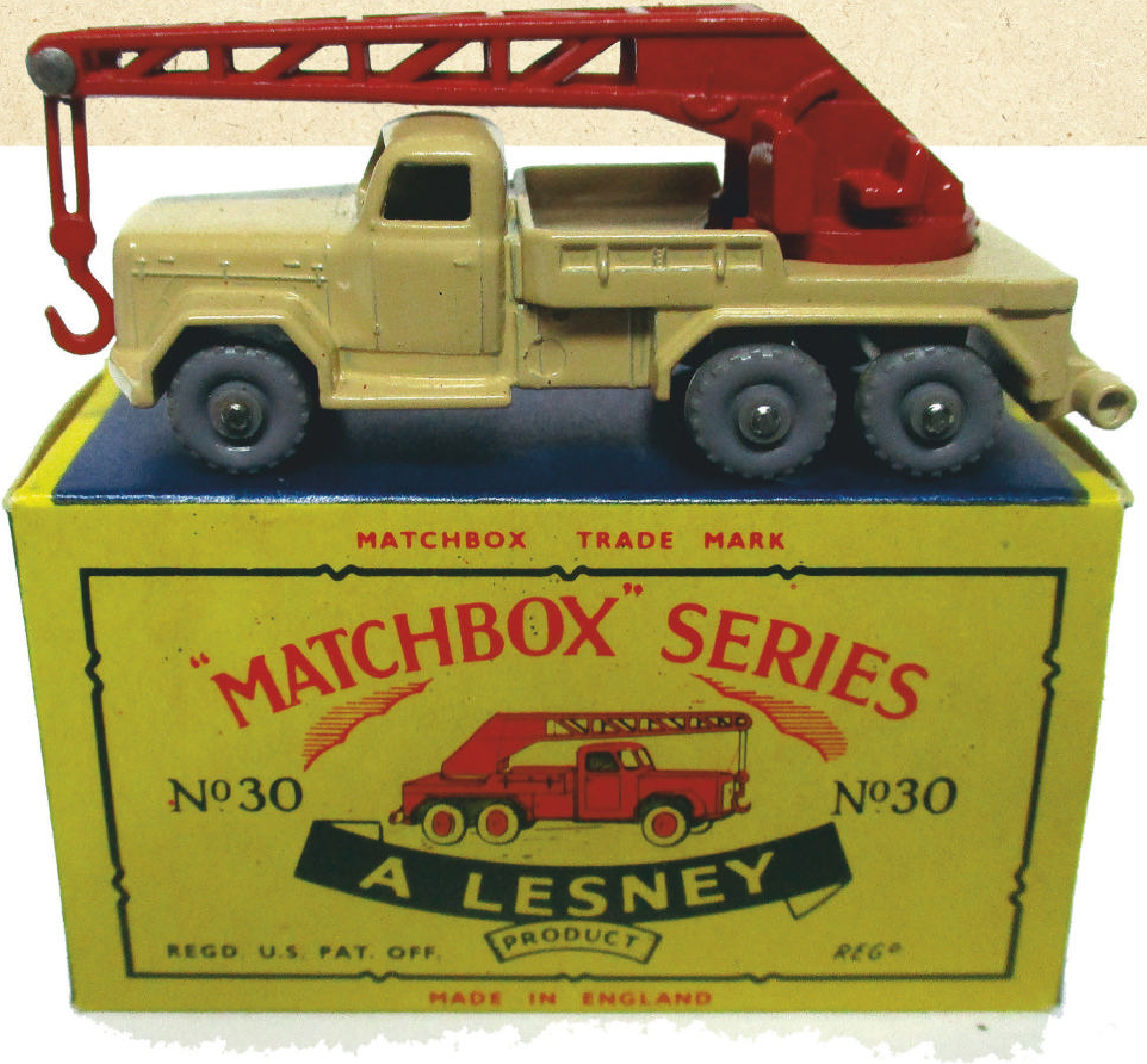
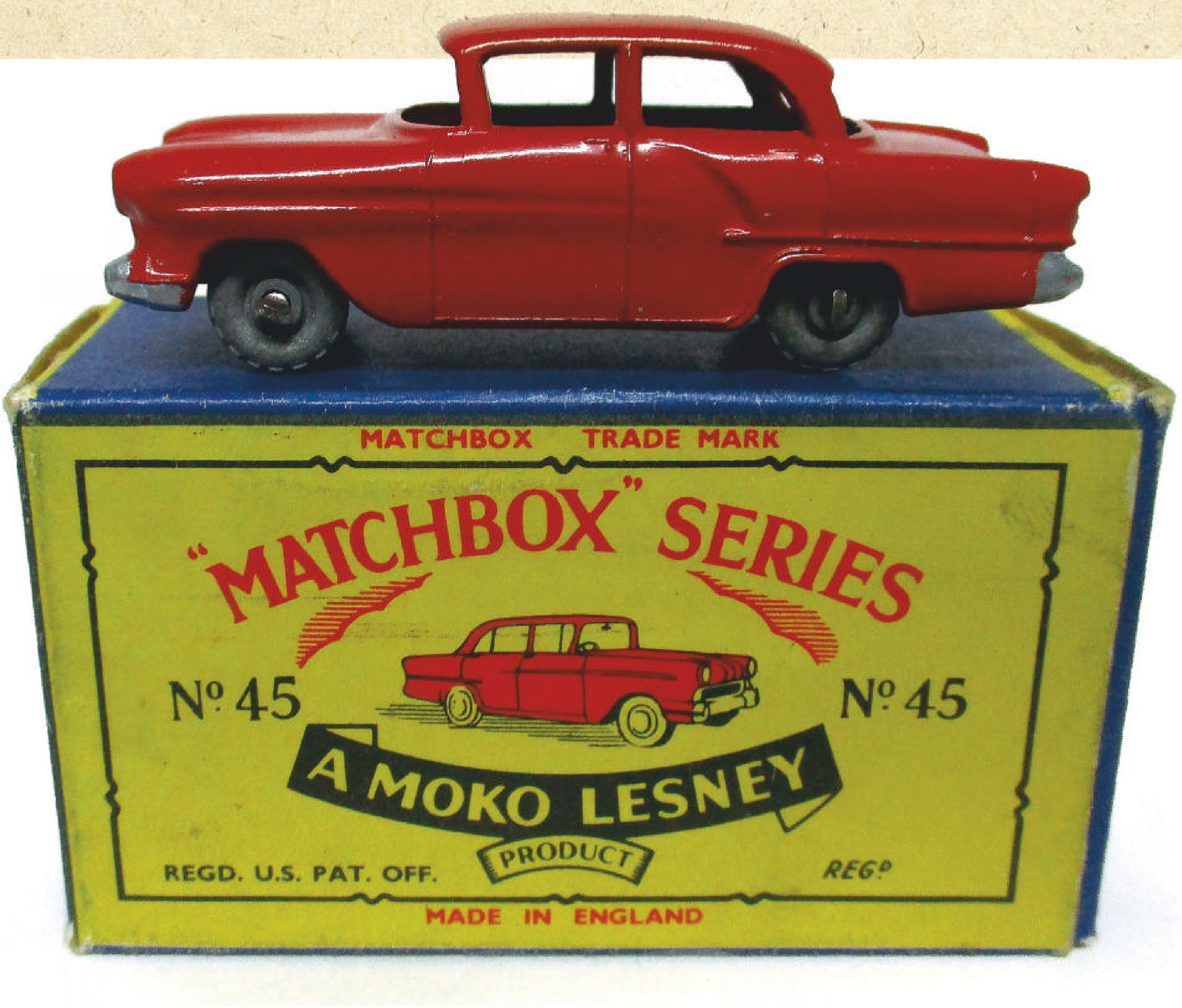

MATCHBOX TRADE MARK
"MATCHBOX" SERIES
Nº30
Nº30
A LESNEY
PRODUCT
REGD. U.S. PAT. OFF.
REGᴰ
MADE IN ENGLAND

03

NO. 30
Tan Regular Wheel Magirus-Deutz

Estimated value:
$10,000 or more

As far as value based on known sales go, this is the record holder for Regular Wheel rarities. There are two versions: one with an orange boom which sold on Ebay for $10,000 and later sold again for $12,000, and a red boom version which sold at auction for $13,000. The model shown here is a copy. The color of the original is a much deeper tan.


MATCHBOX TRADE MARK
"MATCHBOX" SERIES
Nº 45
Nº 45
A MOKO LESNEY
PRODUCT
REGD. U.S. PAT. OFF.
REGD
MADE IN ENGLAND

04

NO. 45

Red Vauxhall Victor

Estimated value:
$6,000 or more

The No. 45 Vauxhall Victor with red body is a possible preproduction color trial that ended up in early releases with the more common yellow version. It's known for its casting without a ridge inside the front windshield, which helps distinguish a real one from a copy. It hasn't been seen offered in any auctions recently, but one was known to sell for $6,000 nearly 20 years ago.

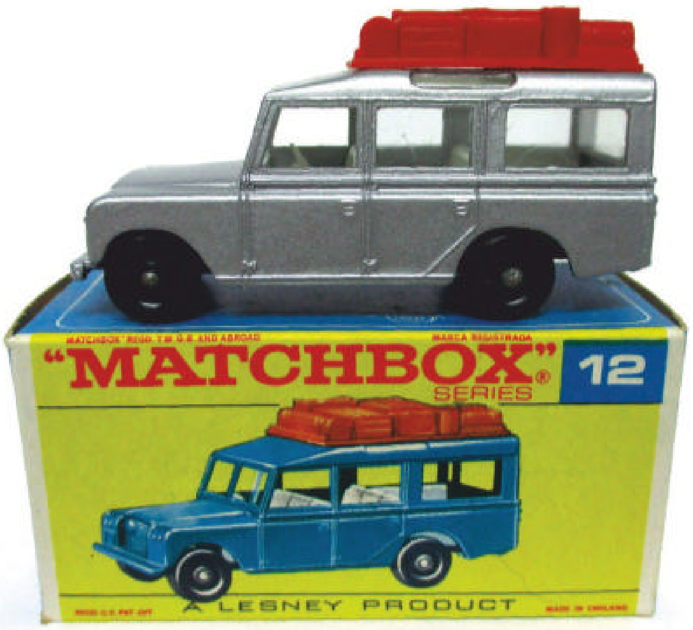
05

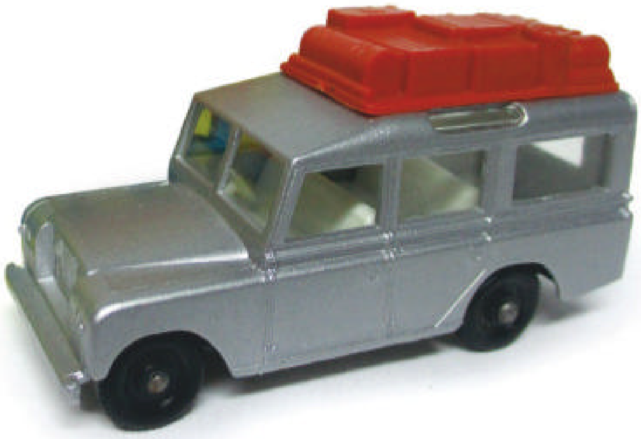
NO. 12

Silver Safari Land Rover

Estimated value:
Too rare to guess

This one is quite a rarity, with an interesting backstory. A full case of 24 was found by a Massachusetts collector while on a visit to Japan back in the early 1970s. After the initial discovery, it was realized that the silver paint was an undercoat that never received the intended final gold finish. All 24 silver variants were dispersed to friends of the collector. Only one is known to have changed hands since, and that was more than 20 years ago. Back then, it sold for more than $3,000. There's no knowing how much one would sell for now.





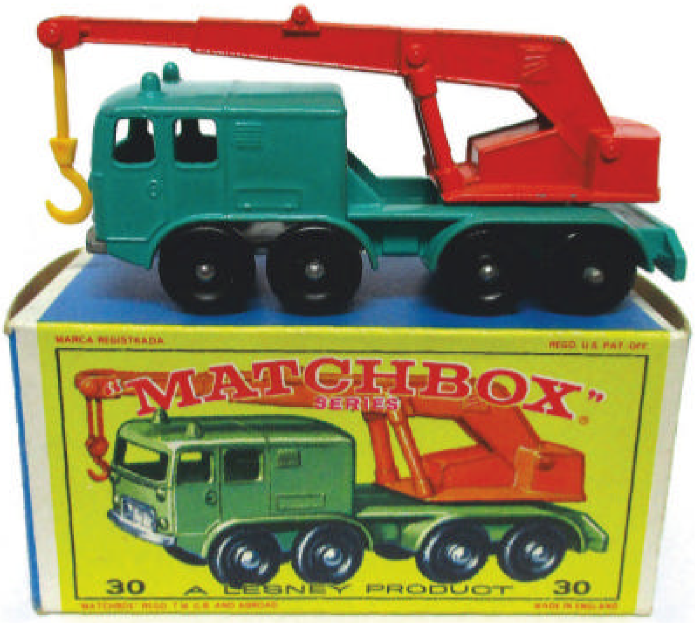
06

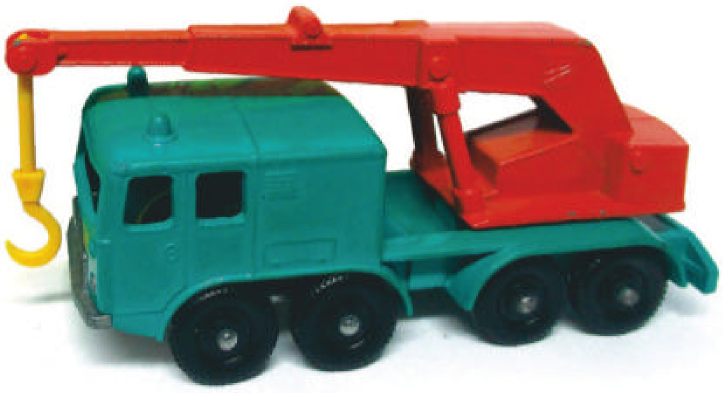
NO. 30

Mint Green 8-Wheeler Crane

Estimated value:
$10,000 or more

The mint green version could have been a production error. If it was running consecutively before the No. 31 Lincoln Continentals on the assembly line, the last of the No. 30 run may have been shot with the same mint green paint as the No. 31. One was found at a toy show more than 25 years ago and sold for a mere $10. It changed hands in a trade years later but not for money. Another was found recently in a large collection but is not for sale. The value is estimated to be $10,000 because they just don't show up.





COLOR THEORY
Several high-value Matchbox cars are rare for their paint jobs, including these four.

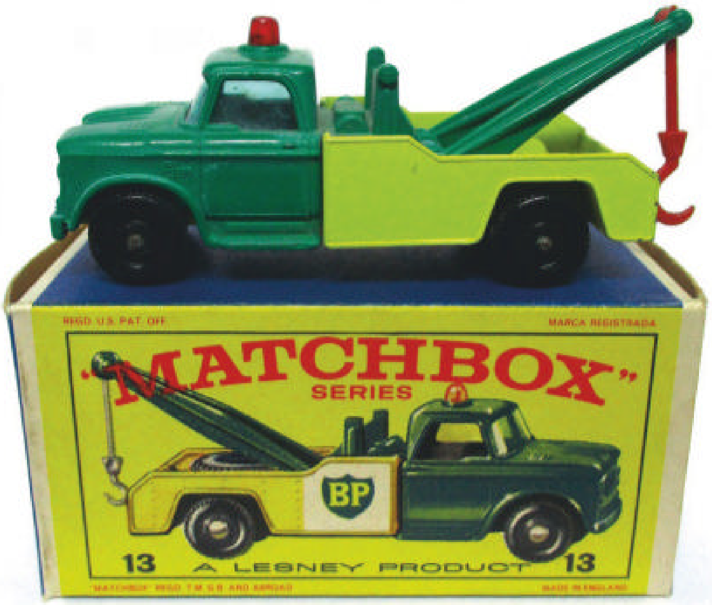
07

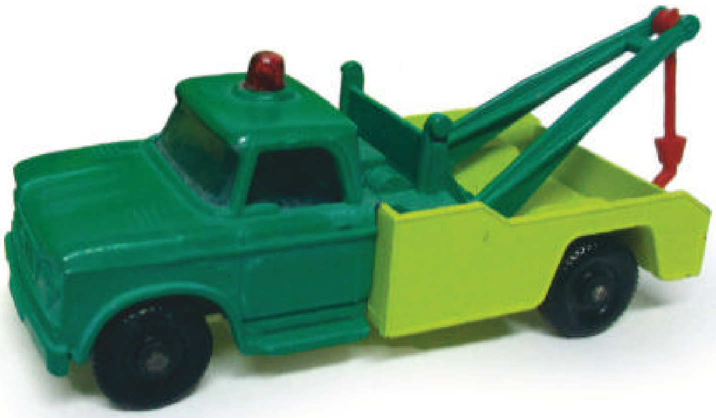
NO. 13

“Reverse Color” Regular Wheel Dodge Wreck

Estimated value:
$9,000 or more

Known as the “reverse color” variant as it is in the opposite colors of the standard release. There are two distinct variations produced five years apart. The 1965 model has a thinner-cast boom and a gray hook with rounded axles. The 1970 model was made by hand at corporate offices in Moonachie, New Jersey. It has a thicker-cast boom, as well as a red hook with pinched (or crimped) axles. The 1970 issue was never boxed. In 2005, one sold for $9,500 at auction. Another sold in 1999 for $6,500.





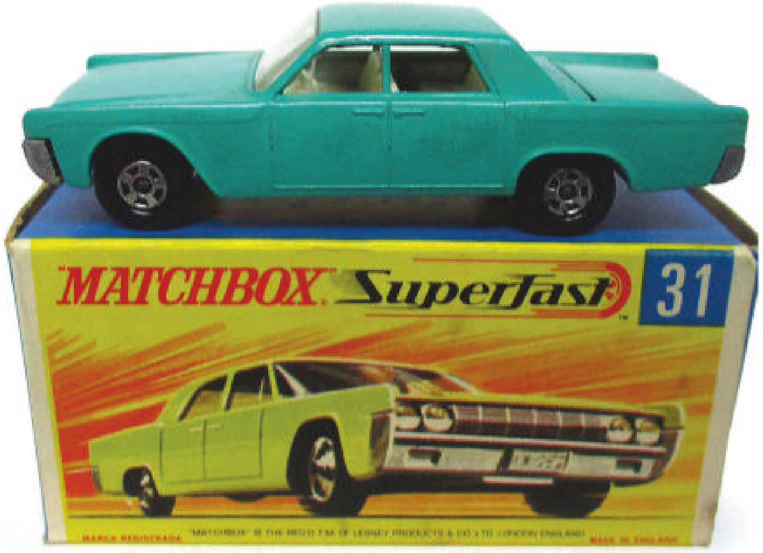
08

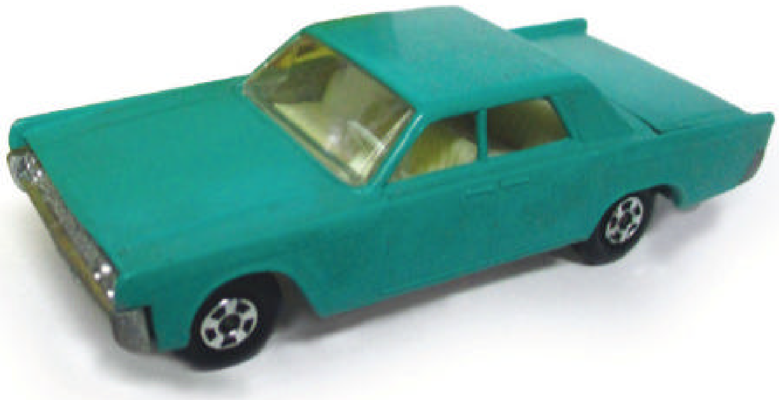
SF31

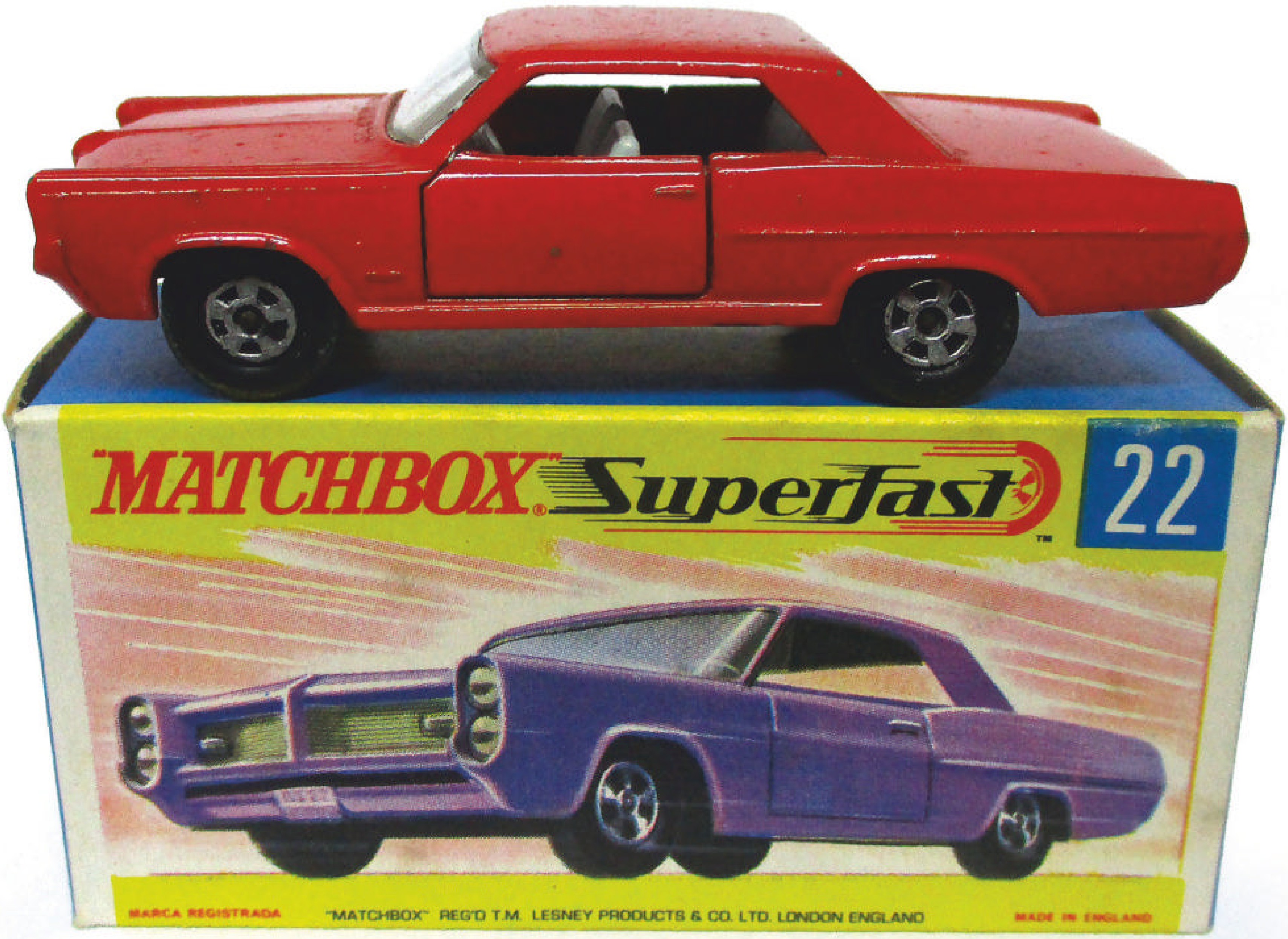
Mint Green Lincoln Continental

Estimated value:
$25,000

This mint green variant with Superfast wheels is what is termed a transitional, because of its wheels. There were still some regular-wheel mint green bodies lying about, so Lesney again took advantage of its old stock and assembled them with the new Superfast baseplates.
One sold at auction for $25,000 including buyer premiums in 2021—a new record.






"MATCHBOX" Superfast
22
MARCA REGISTRADA
"MATCHBOX" REG'D T.M. LESNEY PRODUCTS & CO. LTD. LONDON ENGLAND
MADE IN ENGLAND

09

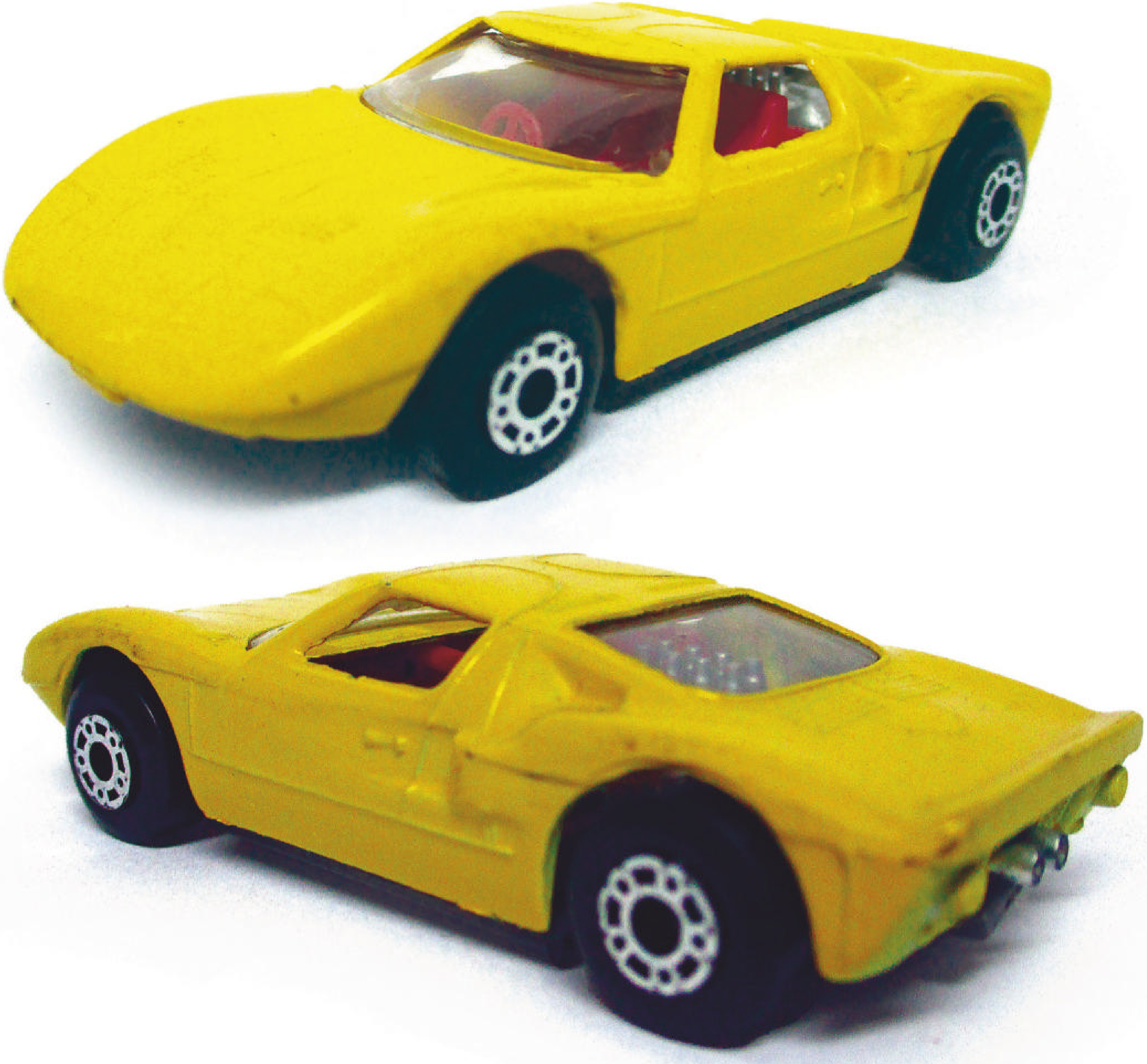
SF22

Red Pontiac Grand Prix

Estimated value:
$7,500

Another transitional model with bodies left over from regular wheels assembled with Superfast baseplates. The standard Superfast Pontiac was purple with closed-cast doors. The red ones have doors that open. Some of these red Pontiacs also have been reported to have small stickers added to the baseplates indicating they were produced in Brazil. There is no recent record of these coming up for auction, but its rarity is certainly on par with the Superfast mint green Lincoln.

SCARCE EDITIONS
The models below have not been seen at auction or on sale in recent years.



10

SF41

Yellow Ford GT

Estimated Value:
$5,000 or more

This is the only model on the presented list that never came in its own release box. The SF41 Ford GT in yellow with Superfast wheels was found in Italy in a multipack box designated as MP-1. A nearly identical version was created and released from a Bulgarian factory. The only one recently seen for sale was at a toy show about 15 years ago for $2,900, but the condition was not mint. A mint version should be worth $5,000 or more.

6.

AN AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Matchbox ruled the market until Mattel found a competitive edge

MUSCLE CAR MADNESS
Mattel's Hot Wheels line was filled with souped-up versions of the real thing, like the '64 Chevelle SS with racing stripes (right).

6
HWGRFX
HOT WHEELS

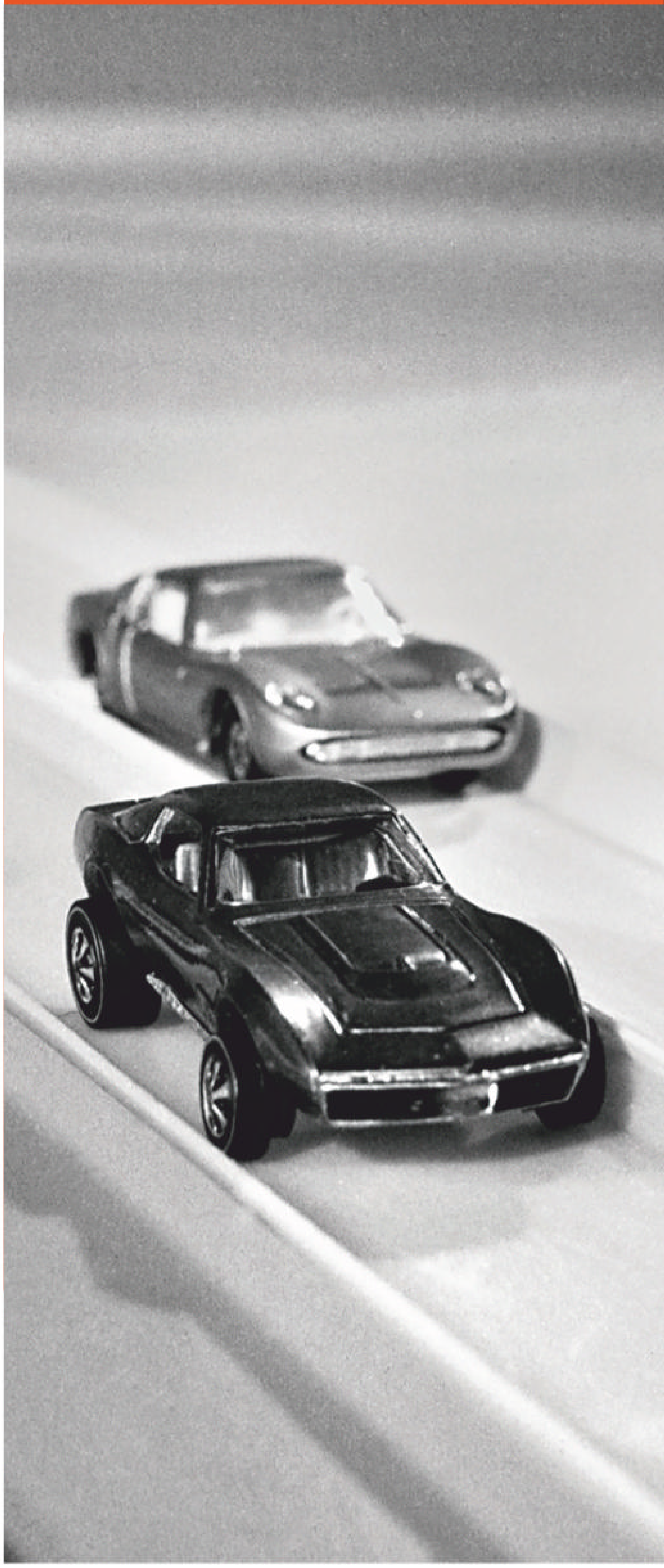
Plenty of companies tried to win the race for toy car supremacy by overtaking Matchbox. But few were able to give it a real run for its money. Husky Toys gave it a good try when it introduced its first line of cars in 1964. These mimicked Matchbox, right down to the range of 75 cars, though there were two notable differences. One was that Husky cars were sold in clear plastic blister packs so children could see—and inspect—the cars before purchase. The second was that they were sold exclusively at Woolworth's rather than being marketed to a variety of stores.

When Husky's exclusive deal ended in 1970, the company rebranded its line as "Corgi Juniors" and began selling through a wider variety of retailers. The company had a relatively successful line of "Corgi Rocket" toy cars, which were copies of high-end cars designed to go faster. But despite creative efforts—which included marketing tie-ins with famous pop-culture cars like those driven by James Bond in the 007 movies, the Batmobile and even Chitty Chitty Bang Bang—Husky was never as big as Matchbox.

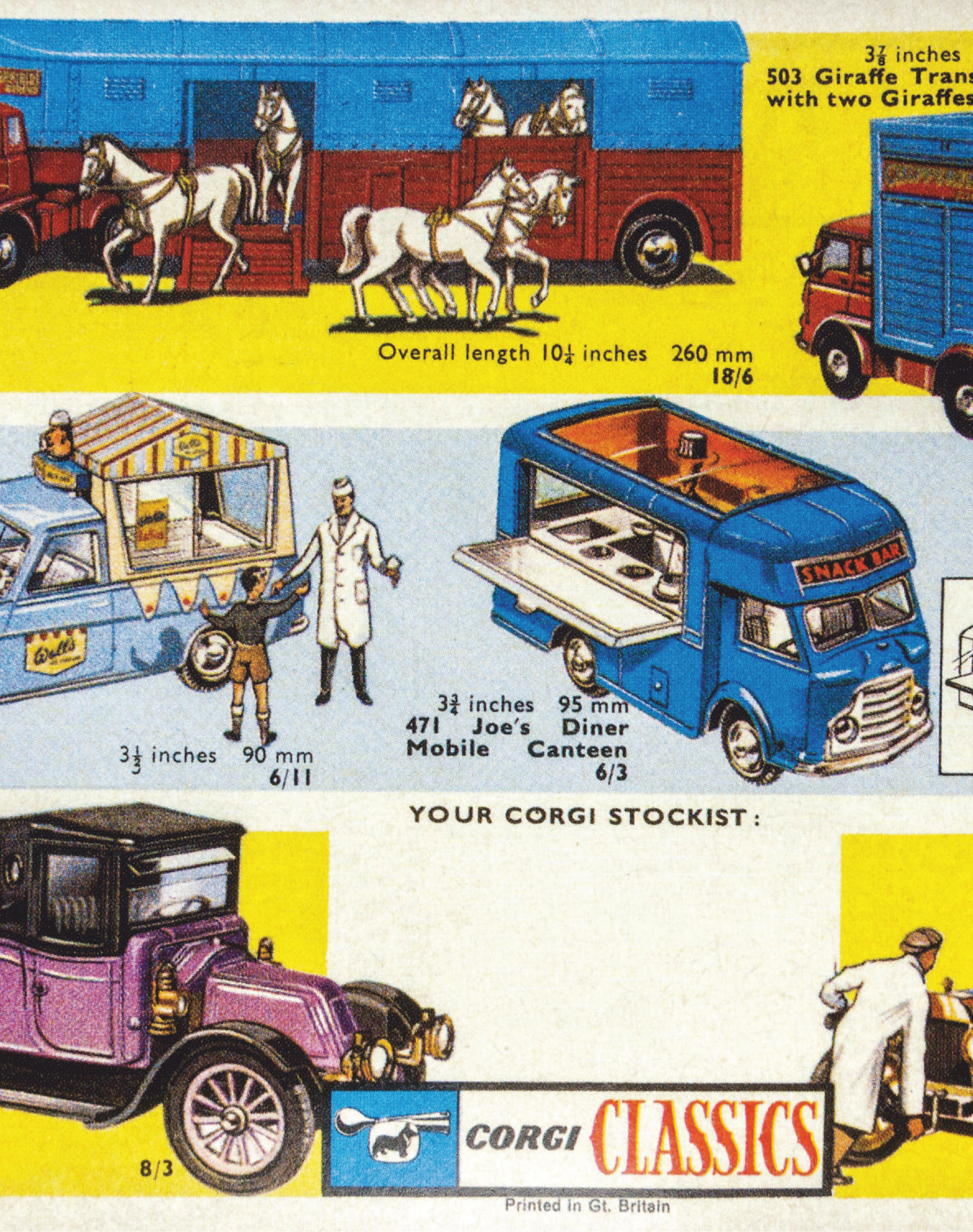
Budgie Toys had been around since the 1940s and was a pioneer of model horse-drawn carriages. In the 1960s, Budgie tried to switch to cars that were produced by Rodney Smith—one of the original founders of Lesney, who had left that company shortly after it was born. But Budgie could never

IT DIDN'T MATTER IF HOT WHEELS WERE PRACTICAL—LOOKING COOL WAS MORE IMPORTANT.

CORGI NATION
The Corgi Rockets line included copies of high-end cars designed to go faster, but it couldn't top Matchbox.



CORGI
Rockets



3⅞ inches
503 Giraffe Trans
with two Giraffes

Overall length 10¼ inches 260 mm
18/6

3⅓ inches 90 mm
6/11

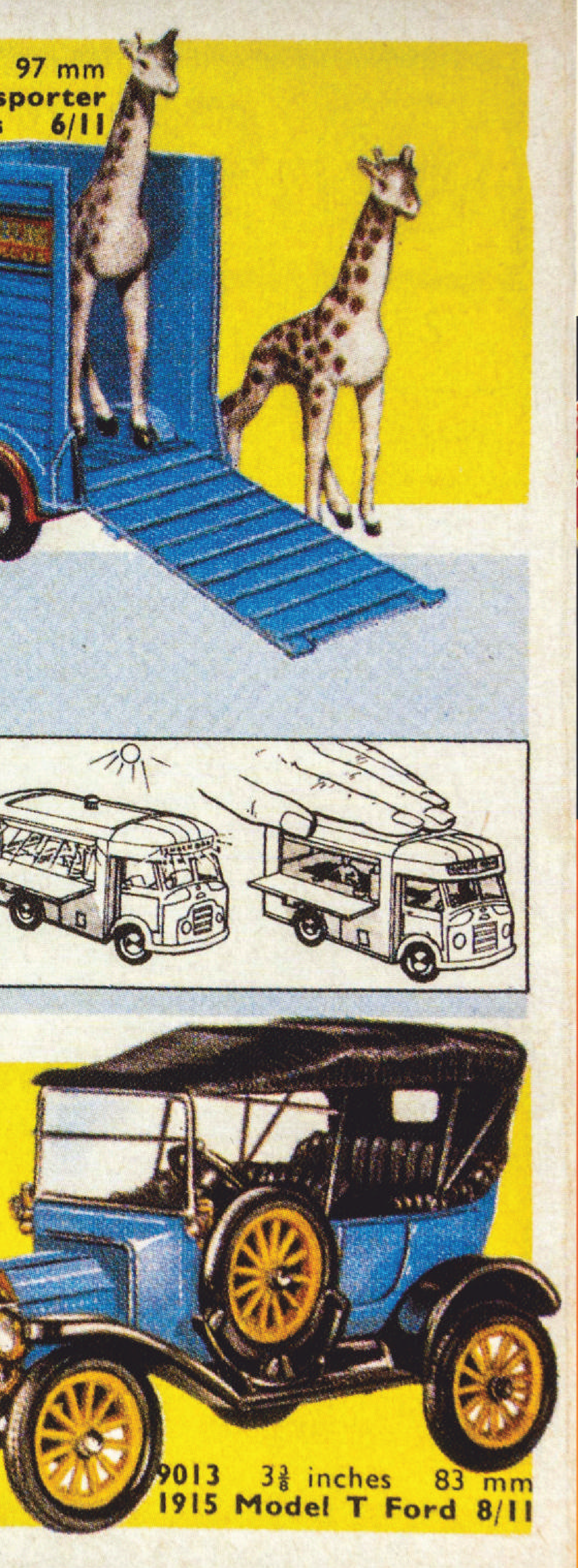
3¾ inches 95 mm
471 Joe's Diner
Mobile Canteen
6/3

YOUR CORGI STOCKIST:

8/3

CORGI CLASSICS

Printed in Gt. Britain


97 mm
sporter
6/11
9013 3⅜ inches 83 mm
1915 Model T Ford 8/11

SPECIAL AGENT
007
JAMES BOND'S
ASTON MARTIN D.B.5
CORGI TOYS
EXCLUSIVE! AUTHENTIC!

PLENTY OF COMPANIES TRIED TO WIN THE RACE FOR TOY CAR SUPREMACY BY OVERTAKING MATCHBOX.

KICK THE TIRES
Corgi promotional materials from the 1960s (left) showed a range of vehicles from vintage cars to food trucks and livestock trailers.

BONDING TIME
One of Corgi's bids for market share included high-profile marketing tie-ins with the James Bond films (above) and the Batmobile.

MR. & MRS. MATTEL
Ruth (left) and Elliot Handler pose in front of a toy display in their office. Elliot developed the Hot Wheels brand of toys.

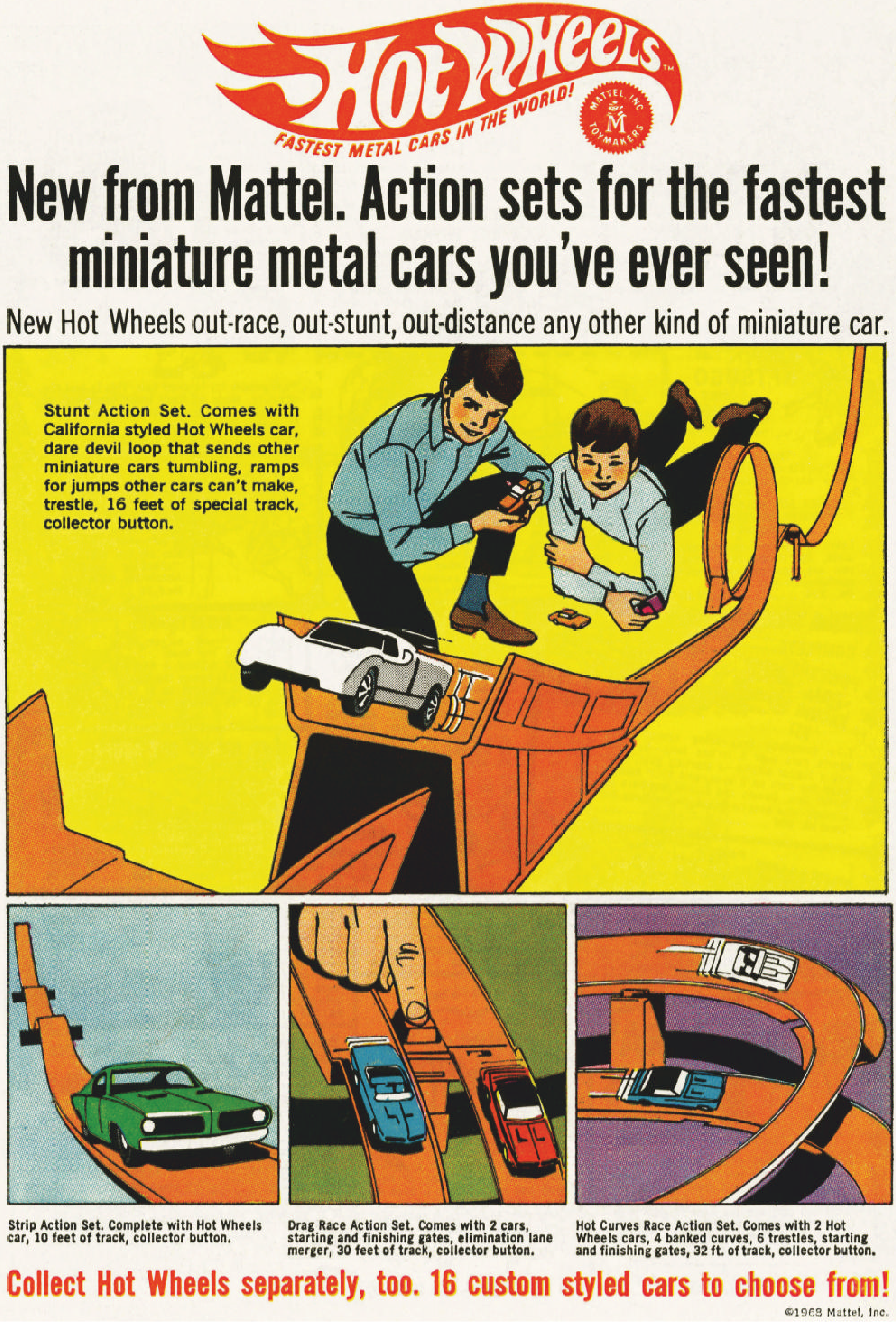
HOT TICKET
A Hot Wheels ad from a 1968 comic book (right). The promise of gravity-defying antics was part of the cars' selling point.

quite match the details of Matchbox and soon went out of business. Aurora Plastics came up with a very similar concept, calling its die-cast cars "Cigar Box" toys. Aurora might have been able to make it a race with Matchbox, but it entered the field in 1968—a bad time to get into the toy car biz because that's the same year that Mattel launched its car line: Hot Wheels.

The origin story of Hot Wheels is as legendary as that of Matchbox—and actually rather similar. Elliot Handler, the co-founder of Mattel, saw how much his son, Kenneth, enjoyed playing with Matchbox cars. Handler had been looking for a toy that would appeal to boys as much as Mattel's Barbie dolls did to girls. In a still very binary age of gender-specific toy making (and marketing), cars seemed like the right fit.

But unlike the other competitors who tried to beat Matchbox at its own game, Handler tried a different approach. He hired Harry Bradley, who had been a top auto designer with Chevrolet, to work on Hot Wheels. And Handler wasn't looking exclusively for a miniature version of actual cars. What he envisioned were fantasy cars—souped-up versions of the real thing. He wanted "muscle cars" with wheels that bounced and street racers like he often saw in California. It didn't matter if Hot Wheels were practical—looking cool was more important. It was a decidedly American philosophy for a very American company focused on winning an American audience.

This resulted in Hot Wheels cars being painted in bright metallic colors with racing stripes and lightning bolts decorating the exterior. The look screamed speed and excitement. The company also developed flexible, plastic tracks to race your Hot Wheels—which included another fantasy element, a giant loop. Was it realistic to expect a Hot Wheels car, or any toy for that matter, to gain enough speed to defy gravity and land the loop? Who cares? The loop suggested that the thrilling spectacle might be possible. It was the same over-the-top promise that was the key selling point for a stunt cyclist who was starting to attract



New from Mattel. Action sets for the fastest miniature metal cars you've ever seen!

New Hot Wheels out-race, out-stunt, out-distance any other kind of miniature car.

Stunt Action Set. Comes with California styled Hot Wheels car, dare devil loop that sends other miniature cars tumbling, ramps for jumps other cars can't make, trestle, 16 feet of special track, collector button.

Strip Action Set. Complete with Hot Wheels car, 10 feet of track, collector button.

Drag Race Action Set. Comes with 2 cars, starting and finishing gates, elimination lane merger, 30 feet of track, collector button.

Hot Curves Race Action Set. Comes with 2 Hot Wheels cars, 4 banked curves, 6 trestles, starting and finishing gates, 32 ft. of track, collector button.

Collect Hot Wheels separately, too. 16 custom styled cars to choose from!

©1968 Mattel, Inc.

FLAMING HOT
Hot Wheels' first designer, Harry Bradley, envisioned fantasy cars—souped-up versions of the real thing.

HOT WHEELS WAS AN INTERNATIONAL LEADER IN THE DIE-CAST TOY CAR MARKET.

attention across the U.S.—a guy who soon became an icon by dressing in jumpsuits like Elvis and calling himself Evel Knievel.

Mattel launched Hot Wheels with a line of 16 cars—known as the Sweet 16—that were all souped-up replicas of actual vehicles, starting with the "Custom Camaro." And even though it didn't come close to the selection of Matchbox's 75, the 16 Hot Wheels cars were an instant smash. By the time Mattel released its second line of cars one year later, Hot Wheels was an international leader in the die-cast toy car market.

This caused a crisis at Matchbox, forcing Lesney leaders to rethink strategies that had worked for nearly two decades. Now it was time to reconsider everything, especially if Matchbox planned to get back on top.

STREET SMARTS
For Hot Wheels, looks were more important than practicality—a decidedly American philosophy.

7. MATCHBOX STRIKES BACK

In 1969, Matchbox loosened its grip on tradition and met the challenge of Hot Wheels

RACING AHEAD

Matchbox sought to regain some of the market share it lost to Hot Wheels with the "Superfast" line in the late 1960s and 1970s.

TEAM
5
MATCHBOX
TEAM
8
16
15

TEAM
"MATCHBOX"®
Superfast Champions
TEAM "MATCHBOX"
STP
Firestone
20-50
"MATCHBOX" IS THE REG'D TRADE MARK (MARCA REGISTRADA) OF LESNEY PRODUCTS & CO. LTD. LONDON ENGLAND

As the old saying goes, sometimes the truth hurts. The introduction of Hot Wheels cars to the die-cast market was devastating for Matchbox. After years as the unquestioned market leader, Matchbox was quickly passed by the new kids on the block. This wasn't just a matter of pride. Matchbox sales fell 75% in 1968, the year Hot Wheels debuted and became the new industry leader.

What the executives at Matchbox learned was that their long history of quality and attention to detail was no longer enough. Matchbox toy cars were still loved, but Hot Wheels cars were more appealing to kids. To win them back called for a new approach.

This resulted in what Matchbox called its "Superfast" line of cars, which was basically the already planned line for 1969, but with new, faster wheels and—in some cases—more vibrant and exciting paint jobs. The wheels were the biggest change. The old Matchbox cars had thin, solid wheels mounted on thick axles that were realistic but not very fast because of the friction they created. Hot Wheels used thinner wheels and axles to create less friction so its cars could move faster.

Matchbox copied that, first using narrow tires that proved too fragile, so they were replaced with wider tires. In its first year of production, Matchbox released 10 Superfast cars, including red and gold Lamborghinis and a Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow. The company even put its faster wheels on a fire engine and a scaffolding truck.

In 1970, Matchbox added more Superfast cars, including a red Porsche. The company went all-in on the strategy, using the same updated wheels on its King Size model cars, too. Matchbox also produced more accessories—especially racing tracks—to capitalize on the youth market's apparent need for speed. They also tried a limited line of battery-powered, rechargeable cars called "Scorpions," which allowed kids to test a Matchbox-produced car against Hot Wheels' electric product, "Sizzlers," head to head.

"MATCHBOX"
SERIES
24
A LESNEY PRODUCT
24
SILVER SHADOW

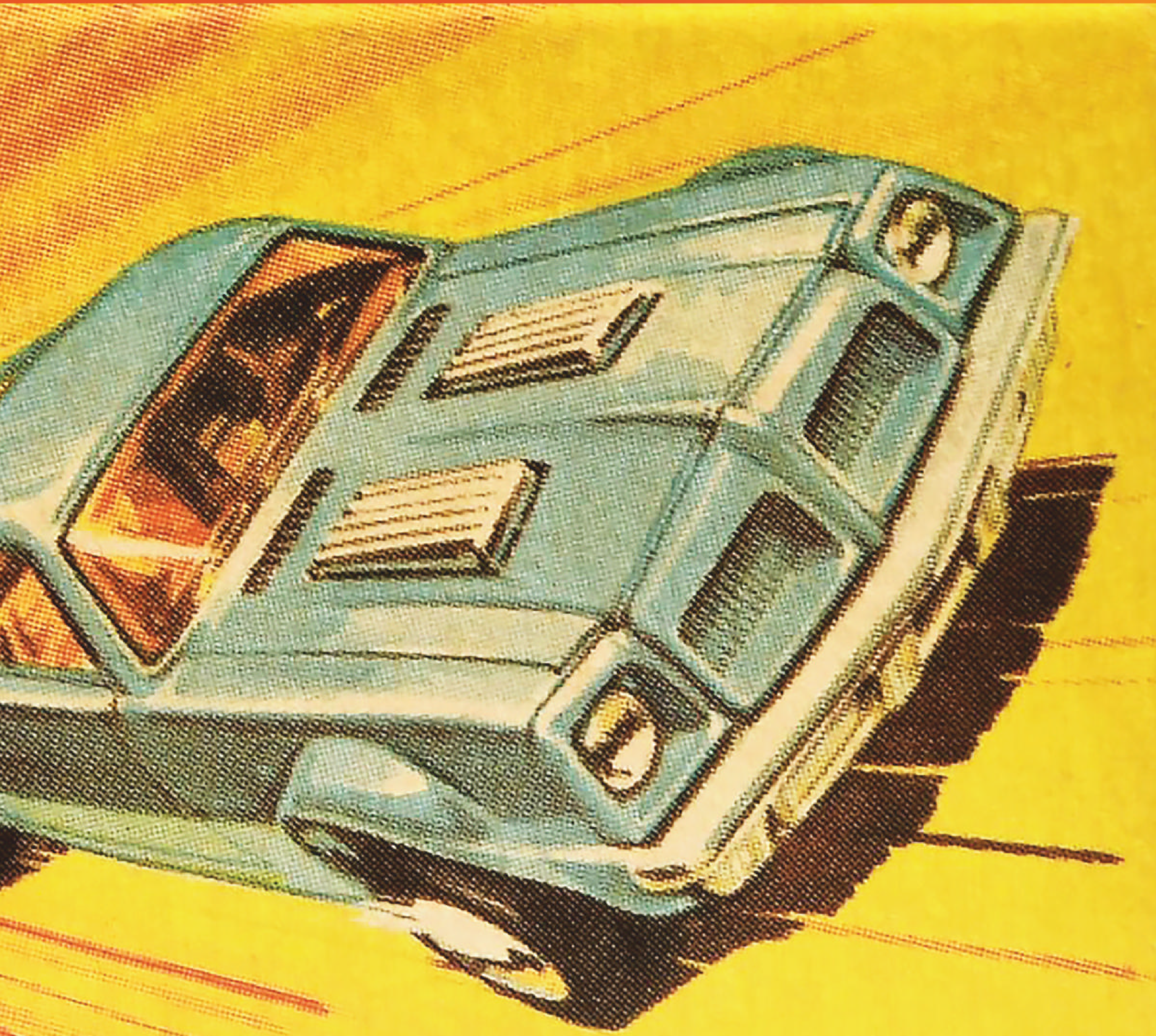
THE INTRODUCTION OF HOT WHEELS CARS WAS DEVASTATING FOR MATCHBOX.

BUCKLE UP
Matchbox copied Hot Wheels' thinner wheels to move faster, even putting faster wheels on a fire engine (left).

LUXURY LINE
The Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow (above) was one of the first set of 10 Superfast cars that Matchbox released in 1969.

"MATCHBOX"®
NEW
4
PONTIAC FIREBIRD
Superfast
CONFORMITÉ AUX NORMES GARANTIE PAR LESNEY S.A.

FLY LIKE AN EAGLE
The Superfast edition of the Pontiac Firebird included thinner wheels and axles to reduce friction.


NE CONVIENT PAS À UN ENFANT DE MOINS DE 36 MOIS.

MATCHBOX
56
MERCEDES
450 SEL
MATCHBOX
new
9
FORD
RS.2000
MATCHBOX
new
55
FORD
CORTINA
MATCHBOX
new
3
PORSCHE
TURBO
MATCHBOX
new
70
FERRARI
MATCHBOX
new
41
AMBULANCE
MATCHBOX
new
39
ROLLS-
ROYCE
MATCHBOX
new
67
DATSUN
260-Z
COLLECT ALL 75 MODELS
MB-10
MB-13
MB-20
MB-23

> **IN THE PROCESS, MATCHBOX LEARNED A VALUABLE LESSON: WHEN TIMES ARE GOOD, IT DOESN'T PAY TO STAND STILL.**

It all worked. Matchbox reclaimed its share of the market, and by the mid-1970s the company was once again one of the leaders in the industry year after year. In the process, Matchbox learned a valuable lesson: When times are good, it doesn't pay to stand still. Putting that thinking into practice, Matchbox branched into military vehicles with its "Battle Kings" series, and into airplanes with "Sky Busters." In 1977 the company even produced a futuristic fantasy car set called "Adventure 2000" with five theoretical, military-style vehicles that were said to come from that far-away milestone year.

But as the world kept changing, the tastes of children kept evolving. Eventually, Matchbox found it difficult to keep up. Sales were still relatively strong, but the economics of the business weren't the same anymore. Competitors like Meccano (Dinky Toys) and Mettoy (Corgi Toys) went bankrupt in the early 1980s. And in June 1982, Lesney did the same.

The Matchbox brand, along with some of its tools, molds and other assets, were sold to Universal Toys, which changed its name to Universal Matchbox International and took over the production of most of the brand. Jack Odell, the original designer, kept some of the tools for himself and began producing and marketing older car models under the brand name "Lledo"—Odell spelled backwards.

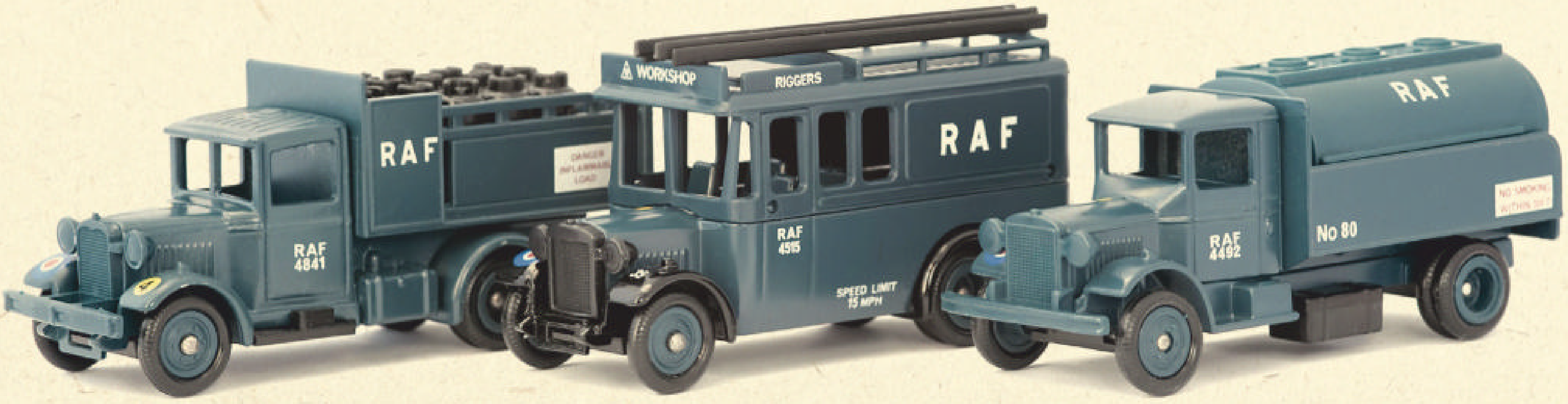
Universal Matchbox later acquired the Dinky Toys brand, expanding its business and giving it two of the most recognizable names in the die-cast car industry. But the financial difficulties continued. In 1992, Universal sold the Matchbox brand to Tyco Toys for $135 million.

Then, five years later, came the merger that was probably always inevitable. Mattel bought Tyco

BOOM AND BUST
By the mid-1970s, Matchbox (left) led the pack in the die-cast market. In 1982, Lesney went bankrupt.

IT'S A BIRD
Matchbox tried branching out into airplanes (above), starting with the Sky Busters series.

OLDIES BUT GOODIES
After Lesney went bankrupt, Jack Odell began producing older car models (like the ones below) under the Lledo brand name.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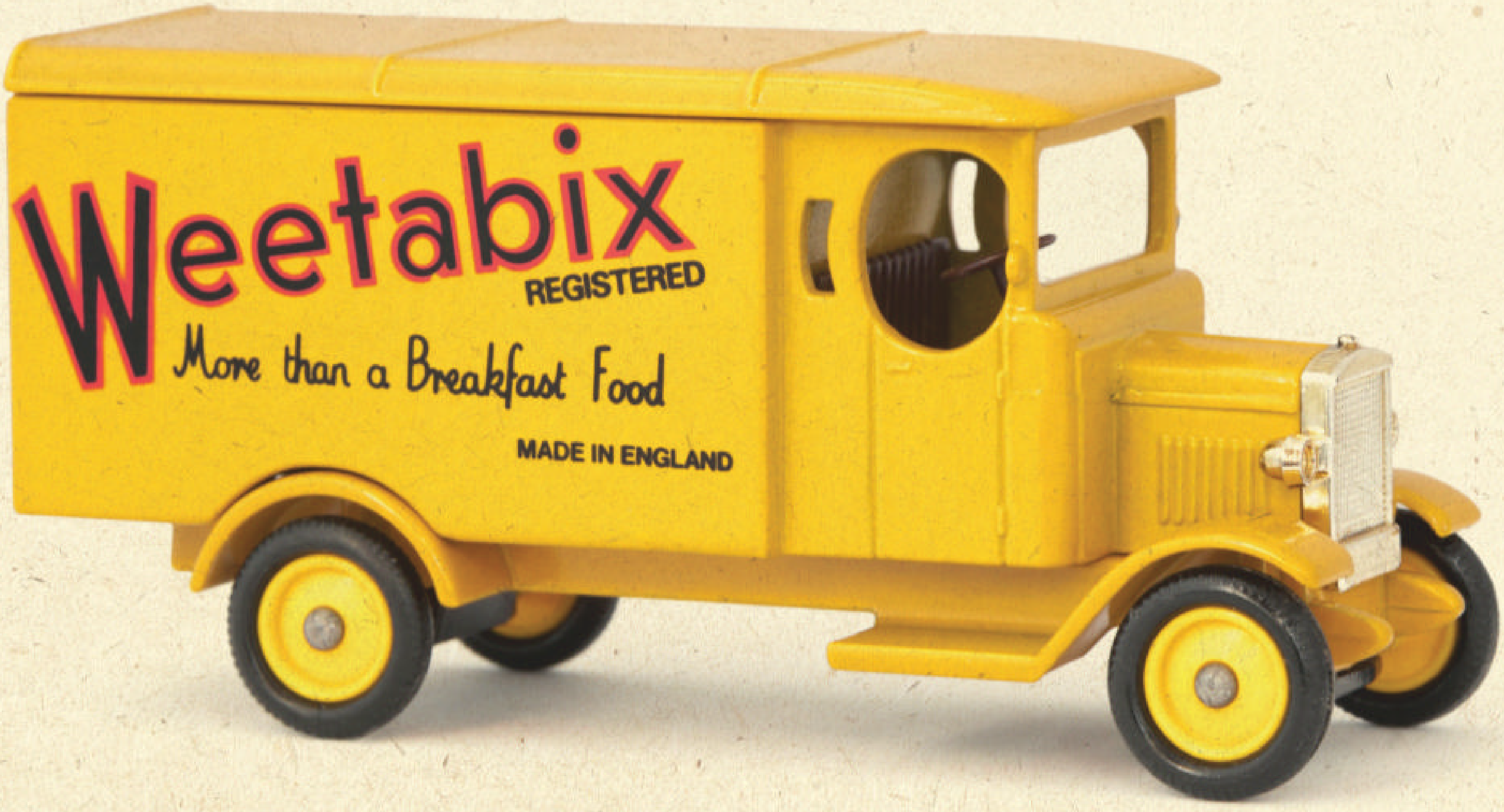
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WALKERS
Best Quality
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POTATO CRISPS
BARKBY ROAD
LEICESTER

CONCERNED CITIZENS
When Mattel bought Tyco, Matchbox collectors were worried their preferred line of cars (below) might disappear. That wasn't the case.

MATTEL PLANNED TO KEEP THE TWO TOY LINES OPERATING INDEPENDENTLY.

Toys for $755 million, which meant that Matchbox and Hot Wheels—once the fiercest of competitors—would now be manufactured by the same company. It sparked immediate concerns from longtime Matchbox collectors and enthusiasts who worried their preferred line of cars—and their cherished memories—might disappear and become an afterthought to the Hot Wheels brand and name.

But that wasn't Mattel's plan. The company assured everyone there was no reason for fear. Mattel planned to keep the two toy lines operating independently, with both lines staying true to their roots. Matchbox would produce traditional, realistic vehicles with Hot Wheels staying in its more exotic, fantastic lane.

That's exactly what Mattel did, and the Matchbox brand remains alive—and loved—to this day.

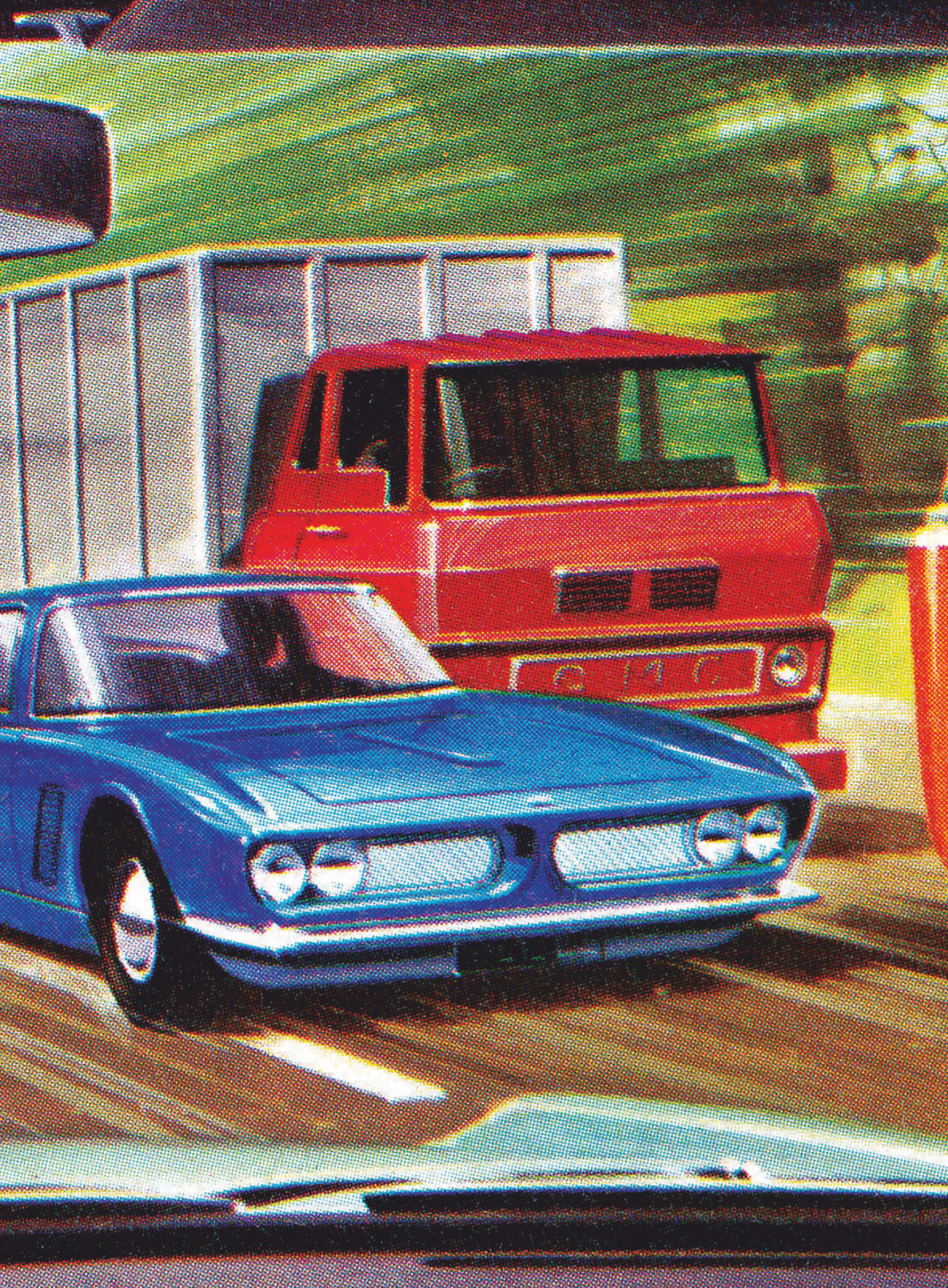
20
100
METAL
MATCHBOX
MBX
CITY
MB742
3+
GARBAGE KING™

MATCHBOX
2625
MBX™ METAL
MATCHBOX.COM™
3+
READY FOR ACTION™

8. 70 FUN FACTS

In honor of Matchbox's 70th birthday

PHOTO FINISH Cars and trucks jockey for position on the cover of the Matchbox Collector's Catalogue, 1969 edition.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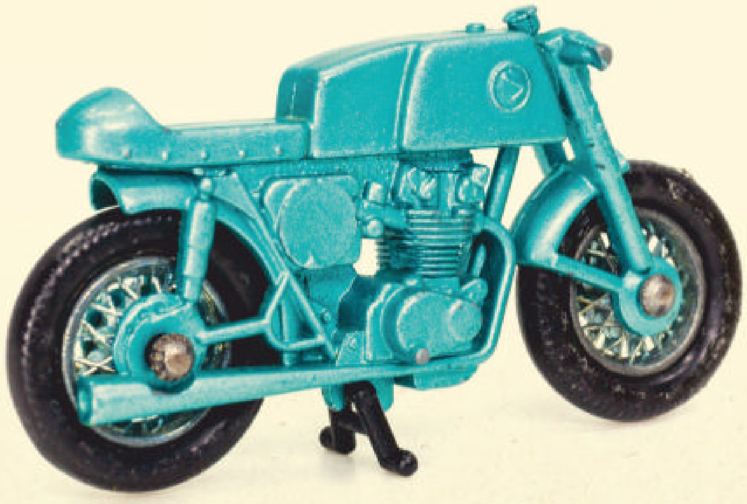


WHEELIE COOL
Lesney's Matchbox No. 38 in the 1-75 series was at one time a Honda motorcycle model (left).

01

MATCHBOX'S FIRST MOTORCYCLE WAS THE HARLEY DAVIDSON IN 1962. A LAMBRETTA "MOTOR SCOOTER" CAME OUT IN 1961.

02. The first Matchbox cars sold for 39 to 48 cents.

03. There are more than 12,000 individual Matchbox cars.

04. Collector Charlie Mack of Connecticut ("The Matchbox Man") owns more than 40,000 Matchbox cars and branded Matchbox toys.

05. The "classic" scale of a Matchbox car is 1:64.

06. Two other Matchbox car scales have been used over the years—1:43 and 1:55.

08. More than 3 billion Matchbox vehicles have been produced since the first product range was launched.

09. The shovel-nosed tractor has been in continual production by Matchbox since 1976, making it the brand's longest-lasting vehicle.

10. Matchbox once produced die-cast toy planes known as the "Sky Busters" series.

11. The third Matchbox vehicle ever made wasn't an automobile. The "cement mixer" had just two wheels in the back and would've had to be pulled by another vehicle to move.

12. The first 18 Matchbox cars were not "cars" at all. They were trucks, buses, trailers and construction and farming vehicles. The first "car" was the MG Sports car produced in 1956.

13. Universal Matchbox Group was sold for $135 million in 1992 to Tyco Toys.

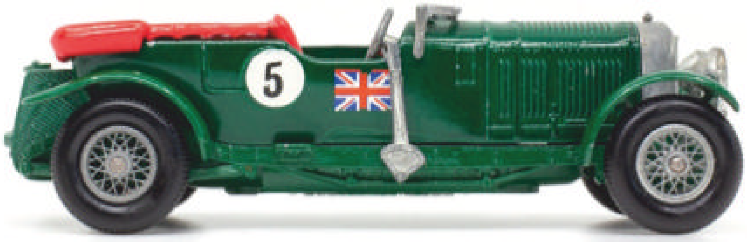
14. The first Matchbox accessory was the Esso Petrol Pump, complete with three gas pumps, an Esso sign and a gas station attendant. It was produced in 1956.

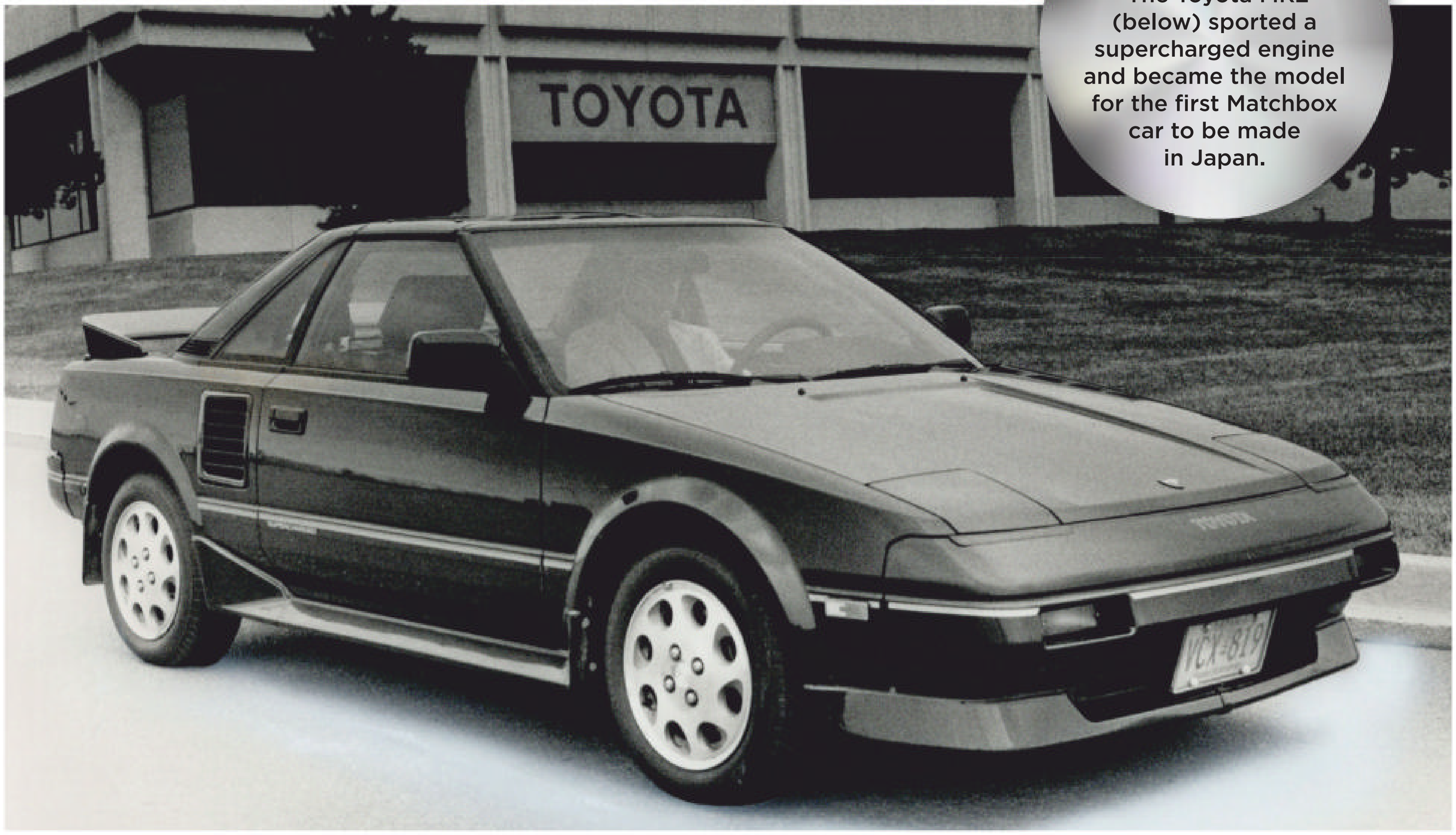
15. When Matchbox began producing action figures and dolls in 1973, it began with two pirates—Peg-leg Pete and Hook. They were marketed as the "Fighting Furies."

16. Jack Odell, Matchbox's famed first designer/engineer, was expelled from school at age 13.

07

In 1956, Matchbox introduced a **Models of Yesteryear** line that represented vehicles from the start of the auto industry in the early 1900s.





TOY VS. TOYOTA
The Toyota MR2 (below) sported a supercharged engine and became the model for the first Matchbox car to be made in Japan.

17. **The first Matchbox car produced in Japan was the 1984 Toyota MR2.**

18. Matchbox produced a flying car in 1977 called Flight Hunter, which was part of its futuristic Adventure 2000 series.

19. Matchbox sometimes tailors its cars differently for different countries, so the designs or color schemes may differ depending on where the product is sold.

20. Matchbox sold for $33 million in 1982 to Universal International Holdings, which then changed the company name to Universal Matchbox Group.

21. Matchbox's most controversial product was a talking Freddy Krueger doll, based on the murderous character from the *Nightmare on Elm Street* films.

22. Some early Matchbox cars had metal wheels that could be removed for cleaning.

23. Matchbox's first non-land vehicle was produced in 1958—the Meteor Sportsman MK II boat, which came on a trailer.

24. In 2020, Simon Hope, a collector from England, sold his collection of 3,000 Matchbox cars for $390,000. That included an ERF Dropside truck that went for $9,139.

25. Matchbox produced a World War II toy soldier line that included British Commandos, American infantry and even German soldiers.

26. By 1965, Matchbox was producing 80 million toy cars per year. By 1967, it made the Guinness Book of World Records for producing 100 million cars per year.

27 The three most dominant companies in the early days of die-cast toy cars were all British brands—**Dinky**, **Corgi** and **Matchbox**.

28. The first Matchbox cars were packaged in matchbox-sized yellow and blue boxes.

29. Air France, Lufthansa, Federal Express and the U.S. Air Force were among the advertisers that invested in Matchbox's die-cast toy airplane line—Sky Busters.

30. When Mattel took over Matchbox, it increased its 75-car range to 100 cars in 1999. Two years later it was again reduced to 75. It went back up to 100 in 2008, then 120 in 2012, then 125 in 2016.

31. Both Jack Odell and Leslie Smith received the Order of the British Empire for their contributions to society through Matchbox cars.

32. Lesney received the Queen's Award for Industry in 1966, 1968 and 1969.

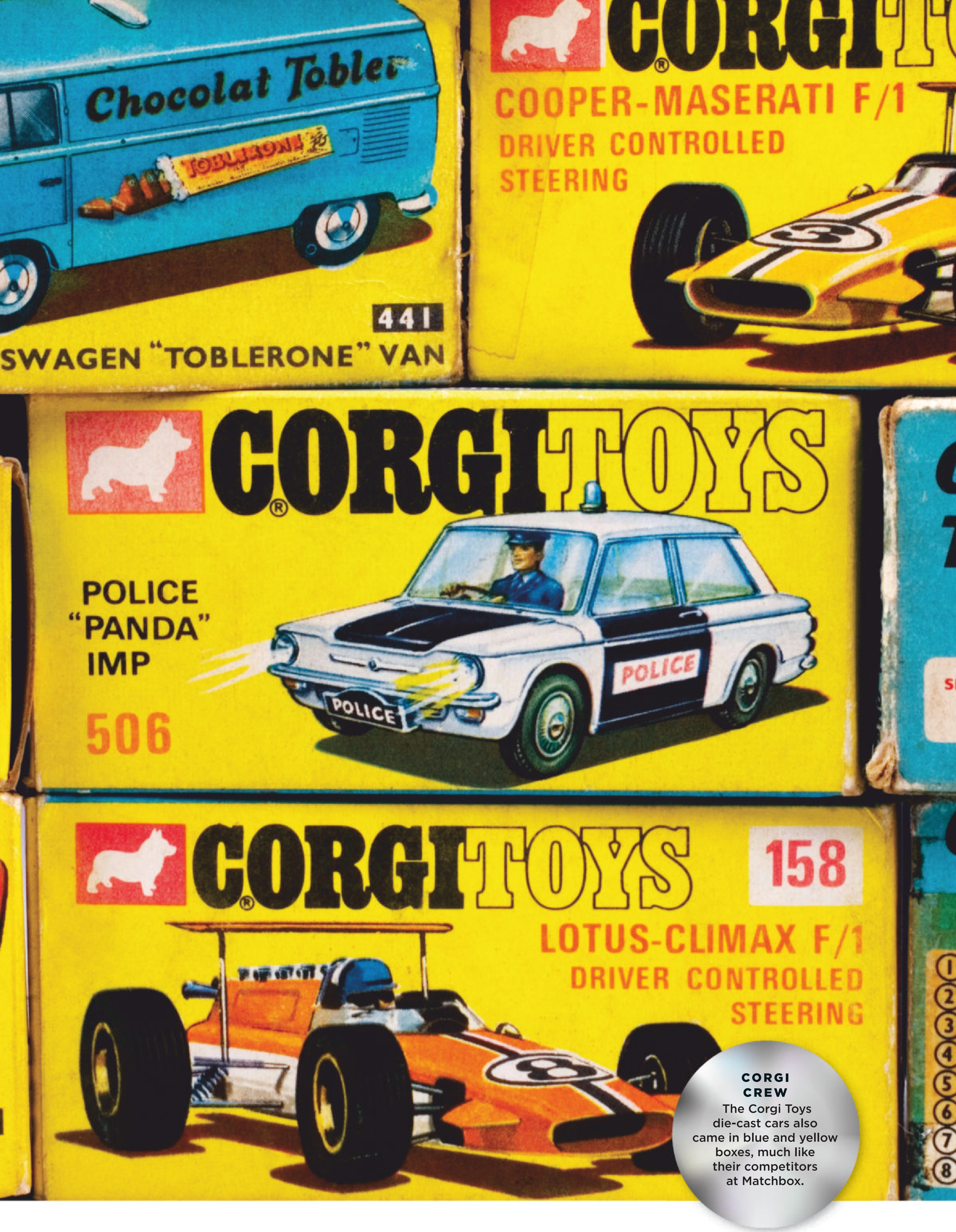
33. Rodney Smith and Leslie Smith's initial investment into their company was 600 British pounds—or about $1,000.

34. By 1969, Lesney was producing 1 million Matchbox cars every day.

35. For years, Matchbox cars were largely assembled by hand, with workers on the assembly line putting tires, interiors, miniature people and other small details into the metal frames.

36. The first Matchbox carrying case was licensed by Ideal Toys and fit 12 cars divided into separate cardboard compartments. The cases eventually evolved to use plastic dividers and were designed to hold up to 72 Matchbox cars.

CORGI TOYS
TRADE MARK REGISTERED
TRANS-O-LITE HEADLAMPS
SPRING SUSPENSION. STEERING WHEEL. SEATS.
VOLK
226
MORRIS
MINI-MINOR
314
ERRARI 'BERLINETTA' 250 LE MANS


Chocolat Tobler
TOBLERONE
441
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COOPER-MASERATI F/1
DRIVER CONTROLLED
STEERING
3
CORGI TOYS
POLICE
"PANDA"
IMP
506
POLICE
POLICE
CORGI TOYS
158
LOTUS-CLIMAX F/1
DRIVER CONTROLLED
STEERING
8

CORGI CREW
The Corgi Toys die-cast cars also came in blue and yellow boxes, much like their competitors at Matchbox.

GASSED UP
The Leyland Petrol Tanker (below) was No. 32 in the 1-75 line for Matchbox.

37

The first "regional" Matchbox car was the **Bedford Tanker**, which in the 1960s had its colors changed from yellow and white to blue and white and its decals changed from BP to Aral only on the models sold in Germany.

38. In 1962, Jack Odell claimed Matchbox was producing 1 million miniature cars per week—more than the total cars all the automakers in the world produced in a week at that time.

39

OLD, DAMAGED MATCHBOX CARS CAN BE SENT BACK TO MATTEL, AND THE COMPANY WILL RECYCLE THEM FOR FREE.

40. Academy Award winner Leonardo DiCaprio says his first acting role was in a Matchbox commercial.

41. When Rodney Smith left Lesney in 1951 he went into the pig and poultry farming business. That only lasted until 1954 when he returned to producing die-cast toy cars with Budgie Toys.

42. The final car produced in the initial 1-75 series was the Ford Thunderbird in 1959. After that, any time a new model was made, one of the 75 was discontinued.

43. After Matchbox was sold in 1983, Jack Odell continued making toy cars under the brand name Lledo (his last name spelled backward). In 1999, Lledo was sold to Corgi Toys, once one of Matchbox's biggest rivals.

44. "Lledo" wasn't just Odell's name spelled backward. It was also his radio call sign when he served in the Royal Navy during World War II.

45. During the height of the Matchbox–Hot Wheels competition, another U.S. company entered the field with the Johnny Lightning line of die-cast cars. This line only lasted four years and produced 47 cars.

46. The "Matchbox" brand was trademarked in 1953 and was jointly owned by Lesney and Moko, the distributor of Lesney products.

CALL AN AMBULANCE
This Mercedes-Benz Binz ambulance entered the 1-75 lineup at No. 3 when it was first issued in 1968, replacing the Bedford Tipper.

47. **Matchbox's first rescue vehicle was the Daimler Ambulance in 1955.**

48. Matchbox cars were almost exclusively in England until the company was sold in 1983 and the new owners moved most of the production to Macau.

49. Matchbox's company headquarters remained in England until 1992, when the brand was purchased by Tyco Toys, and the company was moved to Mt. Laurel, New Jersey.

50. In 2022, Matchbox launched a line of "green" vehicles, including hybrid cars like the Toyota Prius and Nissan Leaf. A Tesla Roadster made out of 99% recycled material was also put into production.

51. The "Matchbox Motorway" debuted in 1967. It was a German slot car racing system.

52. Lesney purchased a fleet of buses from London Transport, painted them blue and yellow like a Matchbox box, and offered free transport to and from work for its employees, plus transportation to school for their children. They hoped that perk would attract more women to work for the company.

53. At the height of its success in the mid-1960s, the Lesney company owned a huge factory in Hackney, England, and had 3,600 employees.

54. Despite promising to keep Matchbox cars as realistic as possible, Mattel bent the rules in 2003 with "Ultra Heroes"—a line of fantasy vehicles. The line flopped.

55. The miniature die-cast Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Coach that launched Lesney's business in 1953 was pulled by eight miniature die-cast horses ... but only four riders.

C0859
PARTS · PIEZAS
METAL
PIECES · PEÇAS
MATCHBOX™
2019 AUDI TT RS
49
MATTEL
3+

AUDI SPACE

This 2019 Audi TT RS is encased in the more modern plastic "blister pack" packaging that Matchbox started using in the '80s.

56 Matchbox cars were sold in matchbox-sized boxes for almost the first 30 years of its existence. The boxes were replaced by plastic "**blister packs**" in the 1980s.

57. The larger version of the Coronation Coach was made two years earlier for the Festival of Britain but was never publicly sold. That one included a king and queen inside the coach. When King George VI died and Elizabeth II ascended to the throne, Lesney had the king cut out of the coaches they sold ... but the lower part of his legs were still there.

58. Lesney bought out Moko's share of Matchbox for 80,000 British pounds in 1959 after a dispute over Lesney's desire to expand distribution of Matchbox cars into Asia.

59. Jack Odell retired from Lesney in 1973, but returned in 1981 to help Matchbox through financial troubles and to oversee its sale.

60. In 1973, Matchbox debuted the Rolla-Matics series, which featured a moving part that was triggered by the spinning of the wheels. That included a rotating soldier in an armored scout car, a spinning light on a police patrol car, and a bouncing driver in a dune buggy.

61. After nearly 35 years as a private company and brand, Matchbox International Limited—the company that bought Matchbox from Lesney—went public in 1986, joining the New York Stock Exchange.

63. Matchbox has a "Star Car" series that includes famous vehicles such as the *Knight Rider* car, the station wagon from the *Brady Bunch*, the boat from *Jaws* and many other tie-ins to famous TV shows and movies.

64. The Matchbox car appeared on *Time* magazine's list of the 100 All-Time Greatest Toys in 2011.

65. Vintage Matchbox cars can be worth a small fortune, but the packaging can be valuable too. An old Matchbox box in good condition can be worth as much as $40, even with no car inside.

66. In the late 1990s, Matchbox ventured into video game production with Nintendo. However, only one Matchbox video game was released in the U.S.—*Motor City Patrol*, in which the player drives a police vehicle and chases down bad guys.

67. The Matchbox Road Museum in Newfield, New Jersey, has 50,000 Matchbox products and pieces of memorabilia on display. It is the culmination of a collection started by Everett Marshall in the 1980s.

68. Marshall had his name put on an actual Matchbox car in 1992. After helping a friend at Matchbox with the design of a Mack fire truck, Marshall was rewarded with the logo of his company—Marshall Service, a petroleum trucking company—on the hood of a white Buick LeSabre race car. His name, "E.Marshall," appears on the roof, too.

69. In July 2022, Mattel announced that a Matchbox car film is currently in development.

70. Cars in the 1-75 series had their numbers cast onto the vehicle's baseplate and printed on the box.

62 The first Matchbox car—the **Road Roller**—lasted 10 years in the initial "range," though it was redesigned several times and rebranded.

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THE STORY OF
MATCHBOX CARS

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
70TH
BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

No.1
Diesel Road Roller
No.53
Ford Zodiac MK IV
No.68
Porsche 910
No.16
Badger Radar Truck
LIPTON'S TEA
No.13
Road Dragster

THE STORY OF

MATCHBOX CARS

Matchbox cars were a simple, affordable way for a child to dream about what they might want to do someday—from car racing to firefighting to driving a family-friendly sedan, anything was possible. So what if you were too young to drive? The right Matchbox car gave you the same thrill.

Rentaset
No.8
De Tomaso Pantera
PANTERA
EXPLORATION BP
No.73
Mercury Commuter
SEA LAND
Y-12
1909 Thomas Flyabout
Y-3
1934 Riley MPH